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DONA LUZ

BY

JUAN VALERA

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE author of *Doña Luz* is not one of those novelists who form their conceptions of society from intuition, as the German philosopher is understood to have conceived the idea of the camel. He has not seen a little, and then conjectured a great deal to fill up the deficiencies. Few writing men, on the contrary, have lived so widely or so well. The banquet of life has been spread before him with profusion, and he has known how to enjoy every part of it. The consequence has been that his development as a writer has been slow and late. So far from having ever experienced the necessity of writing as a profession, his duties and employments were such, through the early part of his career, as to preclude him from all but a diletante pursuit of literature. Hence, although he belongs to the generation of Fernandez y Gonzalez, Alarcon, and Pereda, among the novelists,

and of Echegaray, the dramatic poet, and was in fact considerably the senior of these men, they were all of them famous long before Valera stepped to their side and competed with them for the highest honours in modern Spanish letters.

Don Juan Valera y Alcalá-Galiano, was born on the 18th of October 1824, at Cabra, in the province of Cordova, among the Andalusian mountains. His connections were aristocratic, his father, Admiral Valera, having married a lady who was Marchioness of Paniega in her own right. Her title descended to their eldest son; their daughter eventually became Duchesse de Mala-koff; the third child, Juan, was early destined for the diplomatic career. As a youth, he studied philosophy in the University of Malaga, and law in that of Granada, but his training was more that of a man of pleasure than of a pedant. He seems to have enjoyed a liberal allowance from his father and to have made an equally liberal use of it. One of his Spanish biographers tells us that wherever he went, in his young days, Valera made himself conspicuous "by his *bonnes fortunes*, his wild freaks at the gaming-table, his crazy escapades, his feats of horsemanship, and his prowess as a *toreador*." If there be a touch of Spanish

exaggeration in this description, it may yet be taken for granted that the future novelist sowed his wild oats brilliantly and somewhat noisily.

He settled down, however, quite early as a diplomatist. First as attaché to the Spanish Embassy in Naples, then in Lisbon, as Secretary of Legation in Rio de Janeiro, then in Dresden, and finally in St. Petersburg, he had achieved by his thirtieth year a wide knowledge of men and of the globe. It was not, however, until 1858 that in even a modest way he made his *début* in literature; he collected in that year his scattered verses into a volume of *Poesias*. In 1859 he returned to Spain, with the view of entering politics. He was immediately elected to a seat in the Cortes, and about the same time he began to contribute essays and articles to the Madrid reviews. He threw in his lot with the famous deputy for Seville, Don José Luis Albarada, and when the latter succeeded in overthrowing the O'Donnell Cabinet, Valera received his reward. For a short time he held the portfolio of Agriculture and Trade in the new Ministry, but, on a difference of policy, he resigned his office, and joined the Opposition. When O'Donnell returned to power he sent Valera as Minister Plenipotentiary to Frankfurt, where he remained until the dissolution of the

German Diet which followed Sadowa made it advisable for him to return to Spain.

He was now forty-two years of age, and had been able to give but his hours of leisure to literature. He had, however, published three volumes of critical studies, *Estudios críticos sobre literatura, política y costumbres de nuestros días*, 1864, which had attracted much attention. He had also translated from the Greek the romance of Longus, *Daphnis and Chloë*; those who have read his novels will have noticed his frequent references to this delicious pastoral. His knowledge of German, and his curious fondness for the ancient arts of his own people, were alike displayed, in 1866, by his translation into Spanish of Friedrich Schack's elaborate work, in three volumes, on the poetry and art of the Arabs in Spain and Sicily. These productions, elegant as they were, and adorned by a style of singular purity, might be thought inconsiderable in weight. They sufficed, however, to open to Don Juan Valera the doors of the Spanish Academy. He became a prominent figure in the intellectual life of Madrid. His lectures attracted a fashionable crowd. From these diversions, he was called afresh to political life by the revolution of 1868. He accepted the programme of the republic, and became Director

of Public Education ; resigning this position, he was a second time persuaded to accept it, and was created a senator and a privy councillor. During the reign of Amadeo and during the republic which followed it, no social figure was more honourably prominent in Spain than that of Don Juan Valera.

Accordingly, when, in 1874, at the age of fifty, he produced his first novel, the event was one of universal interest in Madrid. Everybody hastened to read *Pepita Jiménez*, and it enjoyed a success which had not been paralleled, and has not since been surpassed, in the history of modern Spanish literature. This book still remains, after nearly twenty years, and after the large development of fiction in Spain, the typical Spanish novel of our days. It has survived the exhaustion of that social curiosity which led to its original triumph ; it has survived the fact that criticism, no longer dazzled by its charm and freshness, has pointed out faults in its construction, its form, and even in its taste. It has become a classic in the lifetime of its author, and is studied, imitated, analysed as a book which has passed beyond all danger of the vicissitudes of fashion, and which will unquestionably survive as one of the glories of the national literature. It may be suggested to the English

reader of Valera, a little surprised, perhaps, at the unique position which his novels retain in their own country, that they are singularly in sympathy with the Spanish character. In a country where the shades of feeling are violent, these stories reflect them all, yet with a discretion so perfect, a good-humour so absolute, that no one is offended. *Pepita Jiménez*, in particular, is Spain itself, in a microcosm—Spain with its fervour, its sensual piety, its rhetoric and hyperbole, its superficial passion, its mysticism, its graceful extravagance.

In an essay which he published ten years after the original publication of that novel, Don Juan Valera gave some interesting particulars regarding the mood in which the book was composed. He says: "*Pepita Jiménez* was written when Spain was agitated to its centre, and everything thrown out of its regular course by a radical revolution that at the same time shook to their foundations the throne and religious unity. It was written when everything in fusion, like molten metal, might readily amalgamate, and be moulded into new forms. It was written when the strife was raging fiercest between ancient and modern ideals; and, finally, it was written in all the plenitude of my powers, when my soul was sanest and most joyful in the possession of an enviable optimism

and an all-embracing love and sympathy for humanity which, to my misfortune, can never again find place within my breast." The delicate and indulgent manner in which the symptoms of a fervent Catholic mysticism were portrayed, while they were doomed to succumb before the stronger flame of natural instinct, was due to the studies Valera had lately been making in the works of the ecstatic fathers of the seventeenth century, such as St. John of the Cross and Miguel de Lafuente, mystics whose seraphical treatises were, in the words of one of their English brethren, "brim-fill'd bowls of fierce desire." Carried on from one fiery saint to another, as he plunged into this neglected section of the national literature, Valera became first astonished and then enthralled by their radiant diction, their acute and refined psychology, the extraordinary boldness of their imagery.

Meditating on this fervid poetry of religion, and taking "fire from the burning cheeks of those bright books," it occurred to the Spanish writer that a happy result might follow from a representation of a fugitive spark of this divine ardour brought face to face with an earthly love and worsted by it. He would place, he determined, something of this ancient Catholic fervour in the

heart of a theological student, in training to be a missionary, and deliver him, all unarmed, to the wiles of a young, innocent, and beautiful woman, He did so, and, in doing it, was so naïve, so ignorant of the arts of the professional novelist, that he chose the amateurish form, or succession of forms, in which *Pepita Jiménez* now exists.

The worst-trained of "fictionists" would have avoided the three shapes, the disjointed modes of narration, which this amateur has employed for his story. None the less, the world has decided that *Pepita Jiménez* is a masterpiece. It is, what is not a common thing, a genuine novel of manners. Its landscape, of a sumptuous Andalusian fertility, has we know not what of primitive and simple, broad and glowing. Against it move six or seven figures, clearly defined and distinguished, perfectly new and perfectly vivid types. The treatment of these types is often very subtle, especially that of the father Don Pedro, who is perhaps the most wholly delightful personage in the story. That the language is often hyperbolic, that the conversations are sometimes long-winded, that an odour of church candles and incense mingles with that of the roses and the oranges, has to be confessed. But were it not so, the book

would never have become, what it remains, the typical Spanish novel of the century.

The welcome given to *Pepita Jiménez*, which we had the pleasure of presenting to the English public as an earlier volume of this series, was unequivocal. Mr. George Saintsbury expressed the general feeling when he wrote :—" There is no doubt at all that it is one of the best stories that have appeared in any country of Europe for the last twenty years. The skill with which the hero and his not in the least *niais* innocence are drawn is prodigious, and the slighter but not less characteristic and rather unexpected figure of his father deserves hardly less commendation. Nor, though the heroine can hardly be said to appear directly at all save in the central scene, is she less ingeniously presented to the reader. There is no mistake about this book."

Encouraged by the success of *Pepita Jiménez*, Don Juan Valera wrote three other novels. Neither of these, however, produced so wide a sensation as their predecessor. In 1876 he published *Las Ilusiones del Doctor Faustino* (" Dr. Faustino's Illusions "); in 1877, *El Comendador Mendoza* (" Commander Mendoza "); in 1878, *Doña Luz*, of which a translation is here given. *Doctor Faustino*, which has the disadvantage of

being rather too long, is a series of humorous sketches of provincial life in Spain, often wittily and picturesquely treated. The ruined heir of a noble family fixes his affections on several successive coquettes and obtains but small satisfaction at their hands. This book reflects with unusual exactness the modern Spanish mind, and may be described as a novel more likely to please at home than abroad. For this reason, perhaps, various Spanish critics, and in particular Leopoldo Alas, have contended somewhat warmly for a higher rank among Valera's works for *Doctor Faustino* than a foreign reader is likely to admit. More interesting to us, certainly, is *El Comendador Mendoza*, a novel scarcely longer than *Pepita Jiménez*, and not wholly unlike it in treatment. This book deals with a curious question of conscience, and is principally known outside Spain, if known at all, through the fact that it formed the text for a singular eulogy of Spanish casuistry on the part of M. Brunetière, who threw Don Juan Valera at the heads of the French Naturalists, much to the surprise of everybody, and the indignation of Valera himself.

In a very valuable essay on the tendencies of Spanish literature, Mr. Coventry Patmore has shown the intimate relation between the old and

the new masterpieces of Spain. "Though Juan Valera's personality," says Mr. Patmore, "differs from the priestly character of Calderon as far as may well be, the very same distinguishing vein which makes such plays as Calderon's *Life is a Dream* and *The Wonder-working Magician* the astonishment and delight of every reader who comes upon them for the first time—an astonishment and delight almost like that of the acquisition of a new sense—this very same vein sparkles through and vivifies the modern novel, *Pepita Jiménez*. Alike in Calderon and in Juan Valera we find that complete synthesis of gravity of matter and gaiety of manner which is the glittering crown of art, and which out of Spanish literature is to be found only in Shakespeare, and even in him in a far less obvious degree. It is only in Spanish literature, with the one exception of Dante, that religion and art are discovered to be not necessarily hostile powers; and it is in Spanish literature only, and without any exception, that gaiety of life is made to appear as being not only compatible with, but the very flower of that root which in the best works of other literatures hides itself in the earth, and only sends its concealed sap through stem and leaf of human duty and desire. The reason of this great

and admirable singularity seems mainly to have been the singular aspect of most of the best Spanish minds towards religion. With them, religion has been, as it was meant to be, a human passion ; they have regarded dogma as the form of realisable, and, by them, realised experience ; and the natural instincts of humanity as the outlines of the lineaments of the Divinity—‘very God and very man.’ Witness the writings of their greatest saints and theologians, in which dogma is, as it were, fused in, and becomes psychology, instead of remaining, as it has done with us, a rock, indeed, of refuge to many, but a rock of stumbling and offence to many more, and of these especially such as have been endowed with the artistic temperament.”

“There is plenty of ‘analysis’ in the English religious novel,” continues Mr. Patmore with more special reference to *Pepita Jiménez*, “but no psychology ; and analysis which has not psychological knowledge for its material is merely the anatomy of a corpse, and fails as completely in illustrating and extending knowledge of life as the anatomy of the body has confessedly failed, from the time of Galen and Hippocrates, in explaining the vivifying powers of nature. Psychology comes

naturally to the typical Spanish mind, for the reasons given above. It deals with the personal relationships of the soul with the personalities which are above the soul, from which the soul exists; and of which the soul is the express mirror; but of these personal relationships, which every religion confesses, the modern mind, out of Spain, *knows* comparatively little, though, thanks to the works of St. John of the Cross (two editions of which have lately appeared in England), and of certain other works, magnificent as literature as well as for burning psychological insight, the study of true psychology, vulgarly called 'mysticism' and 'transcendentalism' (what good thing is not 'mystic' and 'transcendental' to the modern 'scientist' and his pupils?), shows signs of revival in Europe generally. A most important consequence of the human character of Spanish faith, a character manifest alike in the religious philosophy of the times of Calderon and of those of Juan Valera, is the utter absence of the deadly Manicheism which is the source of modern 'nicety' in that portion of literature and art which does not profess to have abandoned all faith and real decency. Calderon, in works which glitter with an incomparable

purity, is more plain-spoken, when need be, than Shakespeare, and constantly exalts the splendour of that purity in his main theme by a by-play of inferior characters which is as gay and 'coarse' as anything in *Othello* or *Romeo and Juliet*; and though Juan Valera in this novel conforms in the main to the daintiness of the fashion, there is a freedom in his story from the cant of Manichean purity."

The subsequent works of our author may be briefly named. In 1878 he published a volume of *Tentativas Dramaticas* ("Dramatic Experiments"). In 1882 he published another collection of critical studies, under the title of *Disertaciones y Juicios Literarios* ("Dissertations and Literary Judgments"), in two volumes; and brought out at Seville a very graceful cluster of short stories, called *Cuentos, Diálogos y Fantasías* ("Tales, Dialogues and Fancies"). He is also the author of a volume called *Apuntes sobre el nuevo arte de escribir novelas* ("Notes on the new mode of writing novels"), and of *Cartas Americanas*, a collection of criticisms mainly of Hispano-American literature, written in the form of letters when the author was in the United States. This last work contains some valuable appreciation of the

modern poetry of Colombia and of Argentina, as well as of the drama in Chili. From 1884 to 1886 Don Juan Valera, as Spanish Ambassador to the United States, was resident at Washington.

EDMUND GOSSE.

DOÑA LUZ

I

THE MARQUIS AND HIS STEWARD

VILLABERMEJA is not of necessity to be the scene of all my stories. The events I am now going to relate—events of a very interesting nature—took place not many years ago in a town not far distant from Villabermeja, and which I shall call Villafria, keeping its real name for a more important occasion. And then between Villabermeja and Villafria the difference is but slight; for if it be true that Villabermeja possesses a patron saint of more miraculous power, Villafria, on the other hand, enjoys a wider extent of territory, has a larger population, finer houses, and wealthier land owners.

Prominent among these latter was the Señor Don Acisclo, so called since he had attained his forty-fifth year, before which time he had been called "Aciscillo" up to the age of twenty-eight,

and afterward "Uncle Acisclo." The title "Don" had come later, and was prefixed to the "Acisclo" in consequence of the increased dignity and importance imparted to the good man by the wealth which by honest industry he had succeeded in acquiring.

The favourable reputation which he enjoyed extended throughout the entire province. He was esteemed, not only as a "warm" man, and one who, in case of necessity, could lay his hand upon two or three millions of reals, but he was also extolled as a man of parts, upright in all his dealings and firm as a stone wall; and so conscientious, so exemplary in his devotions to the Virgin and so full of the fear of the Lord, that he fell little short of being a saint, notwithstanding all that malicious tongues—which, indeed, for that matter, are never idle—might say to the contrary.

The truth is, that Don Acisclo had known how to reconcile self-interest with probity and justice. He had acted as the steward of the Marquis of Villafria for at least twenty years, and he had managed matters in such a way that the possessions of the marquisate had passed, little by little, from the hands of their owner into his own more industrious and careful hands.

This transmission had taken place in an altogether natural and legitimate manner. Don Acisclo was in nowise to blame because the marquis was extravagant and dissipated, and, far from being imputed to him as a fault, it was rather

to be esteemed as a merit that he himself had been intelligent, economical, and shrewd.

He had always acted with the utmost loyalty in his management of the estate. The Marquis of Villafria lived in Madrid, where he was obliged to spend a great deal. He had need of money, for which he sent to Don Acisclo. There was none. And then various methods of raising funds were had recourse to, some of which methods I will briefly mention.

The marquis, let us say, required two thousand dollars, and sent orders to Don Acisclo to sell wine enough to raise that amount, even if he should be obliged, in order to do so, to sell it at a loss—selling wine already fit for use, for instance, at the same price as new wine.

Don Acisclo had a very tender and scrupulous conscience, and assiduously sought a purchaser for the wine, who would take it at its just value, but without success. He could find no one who would give more than six or seven reals an *arroba*, less than the wine was worth. Then Don Acisclo made a sacrifice, raised the money, sent it to the marquis, and himself took the wine at the rate of a peseta* in the *arroba* less than its value. In this way he made a profit in the transaction himself, besides causing the marquis to gain at least three reals in the *arroba*. Then Don Acisclo would put the wine into casks, and at the end of a year it was of so exquisite a quality that he sold it for

* Equal to a franc.

seven or eight pesetas an *arroba* more than it had cost him.

Again, the marquis would send in all haste for a thousand dollars for some pressing exigency.

"Borrow the money from some merchant in Malaga," he would write to Don Acisclo, "promising to pay it back in oil in two months' time, when the olive crop has been gathered."

Don Acisclo immediately looked about for some merchant in Malaga who would consent to advance the money, but could find no one willing to give it except on condition of receiving payment in oil, in the time mentioned, at the rate of two reals an *arroba* less than the current price of that article. This was monstrous usury—usury at the rate of thirty per cent. per annum. Don Acisclo was in despair, made a great outcry, fell ill through the grief caused him by the marquis's difficulties, and finally resolved again to make a sacrifice, taking the oil himself at a real less than its current price, and advancing the money on which he gained an interest of only twenty per cent. per annum. In this way he caused the marquis to gain ten per cent. more.

The same thing happened with the wheat. The marquis sent him orders to sell the crop of wheat two or three months before harvest-time. No one was to be found who would pay more for it, buying it in this way, than three reals a bushel less than it was worth. Then Don Acisclo himself advanced the money, taking the wheat at the

rate of two reals less than its value, but making the marquis, on his side, gain a real in every bushel.

The marquis liked to keep a team of eight fine mules, which would have eaten a fortune in barley, without being employed in the service of the marquis more than four months, at the most, in the year; but Don Acisclo used the mules for carriage and for traffic, and in this way he himself saved the hire of mules and a muleteer, and caused the marquis to save more than six months' feed in every year.

The lands of the marquis greatly needed manuring. Don Acisclo bought, on his own account, large numbers of sheep and goats, which, in exchange for some useless and perhaps noxious herbs and a few low-growing wild shoots, manured abundantly the finest of the olive plantations of the marquis.

The marquis needed more money. It was necessary to borrow it; no one could be found who would lend it at less than fifteen per cent. interest. Don Acisclo discovered some relation or friend of his own who consented to lend it at twelve per cent. In this way he made the marquis gain three per cent. per annum on the amount borrowed.

Finally, in the way I have shown, rendering exact accounts meanwhile, and demonstrating mathematically that he caused the marquis to gain three or four thousand dollars a year by his

faithful and zealous management of his estates, Don Acisclo came into possession of nearly all of them.

The marquis, compelled by necessity, then left Madrid and went to live quietly in Villafria, where he died a year later of a malignant fever, the result of a deficiency of the precious metals and an excess of bile.

The entire possessions of the marquis at the time of his death produced, at the most, a rent of sixteen thousand reals a year.

Taught by past experience, I shall leave it to the learned critics to decide whether the marquis was a fool or a wise man.

In Madrid the marquis had been an ornament to society and was regarded as wisdom itself, notwithstanding which he had remained all his life poor. Perhaps this is to be accounted for by the fact that there are two kinds of folly—folly of action and folly of speech—which every human being has received in inverse proportion. The man who does not talk foolishly acts foolishly; the man who does not act foolishly talks foolishly. When any one habitually both talks and acts foolishly he is a blockhead, and enjoys possession of folly, total, absolute, and complete, as the philosophers would say.

Fortunately, this is not the rule; what is generally the case is to be foolish by halves. The man who expends his wisdom in words charms all who listen to him, and is the delight of every social

gathering at which he is present ; but, having expended this wisdom on objects of luxury, as it were, only folly is left for the things that ought to be of most importance to him. And, contrariwise, all—or almost all—those who expend their wisdom in the conduct of their affairs are insufferably dull and stupid in other matters while they are thus engaged, though, when the business in hand is concluded, they may again shine in society, either because, having no longer any need to employ it in the useful, they employ their wisdom in the agreeable, or from the prestige lent them by success.

I account to myself in this way for the fact that the marquis—may he rest in peace!—was regarded as a wise man in Madrid, and, by his fellow-townsmen, as a consummate fool.

And his fellow-townsmen had good reason for so regarding him, my readers will say. If the marquis had not been a fool he would have known that Don Acisclo was robbing him, and would have employed another steward. In answer to this reflection, I can only say what the marquis himself said when a similar observation was made to him, as was not seldom the case. It is not my purpose here to prove that the marquis was in the right ; I only repeat what he said. He said, then, that for twenty leagues around Villafria there was not to be found a more upright or honourable man than his steward ; that the boast Don Acisclo made of having saved his master four thousand

dollars every year was strictly in accordance with the truth, and that consequently he was still in his steward's debt, for the twenty years during which he had managed his estate, to the amount of something more than eighty thousand dollars. Any other steward would have accomplished the ruin of the marquis in ten years' time. The marquis consequently believed himself indebted to Don Acisclo for ten years of comfortable and pleasant existence. Another steward would not have advanced money at one-half the rate of interest which any one else would have demanded ; would have enriched himself sooner, and would not have ruined his master with so much consideration, so much delicacy and deliberateness, and in so scrupulously conscientious a manner. Don Acisclo himself believed in his heart, although he rarely made a boast of the fact, owing to his excessive modesty, that he had been a model of servitors to the marquis. Thus it was that during the year spent by the marquis in Villafria after his ruin Don Acisclo preached him many a sermon on his extravagance and improvidence, to which the marquis always listened with respect and at times even with compunction.

By these tardy counsels and sermons, by the respectful friendship which he professed for the marquis—a friendship even more devoted after the ruin of the latter than it had been before—and by the attentions with which he surrounded him in his last days, without being influenced in

the slightest in all this by any feeling of remorse (for, far from thinking he had injured his master, he believed he had served him), Don Acisclo raised himself greatly, both morally and intellectually, in the opinion of the marquis, who confided to him at his death the most precious jewel he possessed in the world.

This jewel was a daughter who, at the time of the marquis's death, had just completed her fifteenth year. She had been educated by an English governess, whom it had been found necessary to dismiss for pecuniary reasons before coming to Villafria ; but the young girl already spoke French and English with perfection, and was well versed in many other branches of knowledge.

In the town she was beloved by everybody, especially by the poor, although, being poor herself, she could aid them but little.

When two years old she had lost her mother, whom she had never known, but whom she understood to be of obscure birth, and the death of the marquis now left her alone in the world. Her father, who had never married, had legitimated her and given her his name.

Don Acisclo was very desirous, after the death of the marquis, of taking the necessary steps, advancing such sums as might be required, to obtain the transmission of her father's title to the young girl, but the latter, when he communicated to her his intention, opposed it in the most decided manner. Although so young, she was

judicious enough to perceive—and this she said to Don Acisclo—that it would be even ridiculous to assume the title of marchioness with the slender fortune she possessed. Don Acisclo urged the point, but she opposed his desire more vehemently than before. She remained, then, without a title. The townspeople ceased to call her the “Little Marchioness,” as they had done during her father’s life-time, and called her instead, Doña Luz—Luz being her baptismal name.

While Doña Luz, like a good daughter, mourned her father sincerely, she yet gave proof of much Christian resignation in the midst of her grief.

As years passed she grew tranquil and contented ; she was conscious of her sad position in the world, but she did not torment herself on that account. It seemed as if she had forgotten Madrid. She had resigned herself to spending the remainder of her days in Villafria.

II

SOME TIRESOME BUT INDISPENSABLE EXPLANATIONS

TWELVE years had passed since the death of the marquis.

Doña Luz was now twenty-seven years of age, and was singularly beautiful—much more beautiful than she had been at fifteen.

Her disposition, naturally good and rightly directed during her childhood and youth by the teachings of her governess, had not changed with years. Doña Luz, without sybaritism, with the conscientious regard paid to the performance of a duty, had always given much time and attention, and continued doing so since her arrival in Villafria, to the care of her mind and person.

With the same vigilance which she exercised in keeping her heart and mind free from unworthy thoughts and feelings, she attended to the material purity and the modest adornment of her person. Doña Luz was in all things the personification of pulchritude.

Perhaps instinctively and unconsciously, or at least without allowing it to be perceived or suspected, she paid more attention to and took more pleasure in what we may call moral and personal cleanliness, from the fact that she was surrounded by persons somewhat rude in their natures and by no means remarkable for their cleanliness either of mind or body, and feared lest she should be contaminated by them.

She was so discreet that she never allowed this fear to be suspected, and so artlessly tactful that no one ever accused her of pride. Although she never lowered herself to the level of others, by a sweet, frank, and generous sympathy she tried to raise others to her level. In this way she had succeeded in inspiring respect instead of hatred, and the ladies, young and old, of the town, instead of making her a target for their malicious remarks, chose her as their model, whereby the customs, manners, and social usages of the place had greatly benefited.

The young men now treated the women with greater deference than before, and some of the latter copied, not without ingenuity, the manners and dress of Doña Luz, and even the style and arrangement of the furniture and ornaments of her dressing-room, parlour, and bedroom, which gave evidence of the most exquisite taste.

At the time at which my story opens Doña Luz was in the zenith of her beauty, Graceful and slender, her figure was possessed of all the

roundness of form, robustness, and dignity compatible with aristocratic distinction and youthful grace. Health bloomed on her fresh and rosy cheeks, peace reigned on her smooth and candid brow, crowned with sunny curls, a tranquil spirit shone in the depths of her blue eyes, whose naturally proud expression was softened by the calm reflection of charitable and pious feeling.

An early riser, active by nature, and accustomed to take long walks and to busy herself when in the house in some useful task, her physical agility and vigour were no less admirable than her beauty and grace. When she wished, she could dance like a sylph ; in her walk she was like the divine huntress of Delos ; and she rode like the queen of the Amazons.

She occasionally attended the balls, parties, and other entertainments given in the town. She often went to the fairs in the neighbouring towns and villages, and sometimes joined in a pilgrimage ; and while she did not shun intercourse with the townspeople, she behaved with so much discretion and just decorum, that she succeeded in avoiding familiarity with any without offending the sensitive or encouraging the audacious and presuming.

This discretion, instead of injuring, added to and extended the favourable reputation she enjoyed in the town.

When Doña Luz, accompanied by her old servant Juana, went walking, or passed through

the streets on her way to church, composed and serious in manner, dressed entirely in black and wearing the *basquiña* and mantilla, some young students of the town, more learned in the laws of æsthetics and other matters pertaining to love and poetry than their fellow-townpeople, would say of her that she was like a stately heron ; an empress ; a heroine of romance or of some fantastic legend ; a strange and wonderful being ; the fairy Parabanu ; the most beautiful of the houris.

Notwithstanding the respect they entertained for her, they were not always able to restrain the expression of their admiration. *Viva el salero !* " one would cry ; another, " Praised be God, who has created so much loveliness ! " a third, " There goes Beauty's self ! " and so on. And on occasion some of them would go so far as to spread their well-worn cloaks on the ground before her for a carpet, or to throw at her feet their Calañes hats, in order that she might tread upon them.

But strange to say, notwithstanding this enthusiastic admiration, Doña Luz neither had, nor had ever had an acknowledged lover ; she neither conversed, nor had ever conversed, with any one at her window. What she had had, however, was a multitude of admirers, to none of whom she had ever given any encouragement. The richest young men of the country for some leagues around had come to look upon her as an impregnable fortress. Hope, however, never abandons

us completely. In the matter of conquests men are apt—for the most part—to imagine that they will in the end prove successful. So that if the young men of the place were now undeceived and had desisted from their pretensions, there were not wanting strangers—provided they were persons of a certain rank—who went into ecstasies of admiration at sight of Doña Luz, and resolved in their own minds to succeed where every one else had failed ; but these, also, were in their turn soon undeceived.

This persistent adoration, this eager desire to win the love of Doña Luz, had been cherished in turn by many. None of them had arrived at a declaration, however. Doña Luz knew how to comport herself in such a manner as to prevent her ever finding herself in the harsh necessity of giving a formal refusal, and drawing on herself the enmity which such a refusal would occasion. It was difficult to speak alone with her. It was difficult to cause a note or a love letter to reach her. And although—thanks to some pushing old woman or other, such as are never found wanting in these cases—Doña Luz had received communications both in prose and verse, she had always returned these communications unopened. In view of these and other manifestations of coldness, all her lovers had at last desisted from their pretensions without ever having received motive, or even a pretext, for complaint.

Nor could there be motive for such complaint.

Doña Luz never gave any reason which could offend for not wishing to marry. She felt no inclination for marriage. She was not in love. No one can command his feelings. Such were the reasons she gave.

The invincible repugnance caused her by all that was vulgar and plebeian, and the horror that took possession of her at the thought of the possibility of her one day having a child who should bear her illustrious name united to the obscure and rustic appellation of some rich country clown, might indeed be suspected, but this suspicion found no justification either in her words or acts.

To sum up, if Doña Luz entertained no hope of marrying according to her inclinations, neither, on the other hand, did she entertain or give ground for the suspicion that she entertained the slightest desire of doing so. Her manner revealed only tranquil coldness and gentle contentment. The most cynical of men would have tried in vain to discover in her acts, words, or looks the slightest indication of disappointment.

Nor was she in reality disappointed. She had chosen her part with decision, and had traced out beforehand her path in life. The satirical expression "old maid" had produced no effect on her steadfast and courageous soul, nor could it either force or induce her to accept a husband merely in order to avoid incurring this reproach.

Various ladies, rich relations of Doña Luz re-

residing in Seville and Madrid, had invited her to take up her abode with them ; but whether such were really the case, or whether she only suspected it to be so, Doña Luz looked upon these invitations as being given rather through compliment than from the heart. Besides, she regarded herself as poor for her station, and she was unwilling to be a burden upon any one, or to live at the cost of any one in a sort of dependence but little removed from servitude. She had, consequently, refused all these invitations. Her intention was to live and die in obscurity at Villafria.

The stain resting on her birth, the humble condition of her unknown mother, reacted upon her feelings, converting her pride into something that was almost haughtiness. To efface that original stain Doña Luz desired to be all the purer and freer from stain.

She desired neither to ask favours from, nor to be dependent upon any one.

She still kept possession of her ancestral house in Villafria, with all its furniture, and retained in her service two of the former servants of the family. Although she did not now reside in it, it was her intention to do so at a future time—when Don Acisclo should be no more, or when she should be old enough to live alone without causing comment.

Meantime, Doña Luz lived in Don Acisclo's house, a spacious habitation, in which she had her separate apartments, and to which she had caused

to be removed her richest and handsomest articles of furniture and her favourite books.

In payment of this hospitality she obliged Don Acisclo to accept, notwithstanding his protestations, more than one half of her income—that is to say, eight thousand reals a year. With the remainder, as she was prudent and economical, she was able to dress herself, to buy books, and to help the poor.

Her only luxury, her one extravagance, was a magnificent black horse, on which she took long rides, accompanied by Don Acisclo or by Tomás, a servant who had grown old in her father's service.

Don Acisclo had been for many years a widower. He had two sons and three daughters, all married and living in their own houses, so that in the solitude of that immense house Doña Luz and Don Acisclo served each other for company.

Don Acisclo was now nearing his seventieth year, but he was strong and healthy. He held himself erect as a young poplar, he was thin, and active in his movements, and although his learning was confined to a passable knowledge of reading and writing and of the four rules of arithmetic, and although he had never read a book through in his life, he had a great deal of natural ability of a practical kind. He had never troubled his conscience with moral subtleties. Therefore it was that, as I have said, he felt no remorse for having contributed to the ruin of the marquis. If he had

profited by it, he thought it better that he should have done so than any one else. It would have grieved him greatly to see his master's wealth in the hands of a stranger. He enjoyed it, consequently, without any scruples of conscience, as if it belonged to him by right, and even with and through a certain sentiment of veneration for the memory of its deceased illustrious possessor.

This sentiment of veneration extended to, or rather became intensified and reached its height, without affectation or servility, in the case of Doña Luz, who, fascinated as he was by the spell she exercised over him, was for the old man a being whose secret thoughts, motives, and springs of action he could only faintly comprehend, a creature strange and uncommon and of a different order from himself, but with whom, nevertheless, he sat at table daily and who did him the honour to share his habitation.

III

CONCERNING OTHER DETAILS WHICH THE CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES OF THE NARRATOR WILL NOT PERMIT HIM TO PASS OVER IN SILENCE.

THIS habitation consisted, like that of many other rich proprietors of Andalusia, of two adjoining houses communicating with each other—the house of the master and another which is always called the “country house,” although it may be situated in the centre of the town.

The master's house had no other inhabitants than Don Acisclo at one extreme, and Doña Luz, with her old servant Juana, who slept in a room adjoining that of her mistress, at the other.

There was a large dining-room, a smaller dining-room for ordinary use, and various drawing-rooms of state, which were opened only on ceremonious occasions, and which were adorned, along with other precious objects, by the portraits of Don Acisclo, his sons and daughters, his sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, painted in oil, larger than

life and almost full figure, by an itinerant artist who had had the happy inspiration of passing through Villafria, and who had charged an ounce in gold for each of the portraits. Don Acisclo, it is true, had heaped attentions upon him; treating him like a king and seating him at his own table during the whole time spent in painting the portraits, which extended over five months, and presenting him at his departure with innumerable trifles, such as a small keg of double-distilled anisette, a quantity of dried fruit, and some almond and pine-nut paste. And the portraits were well worthy of it all from the likeness they bore to the originals. There was nothing wanting but that they should speak. The lace adorning the dresses of the ladies was at first, it is true, a little indistinct; but in response to the complaints of the said ladies the artist had arranged the matter by means of an ingenious device. He moistened a piece of net with white paint, laid it over that part of the picture which represented the lace; when this was dry the effect was marvellous, for the lace was now so distinct that each separate hole in it could be counted.

All these apartments were on the main floor, where were two fire-places, such as in that part of the country are called French, and which were lighted only in the depth of winter when the bishop visited the town; and on these occasions, indeed, his reverence came very near being suffocated with the smoke sent forth by them. But in

exchange there was a magnificent family kitchen with a bell-shaped chimney which had a splendid draught, where during the cold season burned constantly olive and oak logs and rich *orujo* paste,* which was seldom used for cooking, and where the members of the family warmed themselves very comfortably. The walls of this kitchen were adorned with various cages containing partridges standing on shelves, guns and other weapons, and heads of stags, wolves, foxes, badgers and martens, which had been killed by Don Acisclo.

On the ground floor there was almost as much space as on the main floor, and, indeed, counting the yard covered with awning, there was more. There the family lived during the summer. There at every season Don Acisclo had his office, where he carried on his dealings with hucksters, agents, shepherds, farmers, overseers, and landlords, meaning by landlords not the terror of the tardy tenants of Madrid, but the caretakers of the lodging-houses which are erected on every rural estate.

On the ground floor, too, in the principal apartment, which, from its shape, was called the "square," there was an object which conferred additional splendour on the house. It must be known that in not a few of the towns and villages of Andalusia, there are a number of images and saints which are carried in procession at the great religious

* The skins and seeds of the grapes after the juice has been expressed.

festivals, and especially during Holy Week. The number of these images is so large that frequently there is not room enough for them all in the churches, for which reason many of them are deposited in private houses, remaining there permanently, with the exception of the one particular day of the year on which they are carried in procession. Don Acisclo had one of these images, a representation of the patron of the brotherhood to which he belonged, in the "square" on the ground floor; but this was not one of those insignificant images which are to be had for almost nothing—on the contrary, it was one of the most complicated character and the most elaborate and costly workmanship which it was possible to find, although it did not, indeed, bear out the saying—

Santirulitos, bonitos, baratos,
Ni comen, ni beben, ni gastan zapatos.*

For this image or representation ate and drank, or rather supped; it was nothing less than the Last Supper. Christ and the twelve apostles, life-size, were represented seated at the table, Christ pronouncing the blessing, St. John sleeping and leaning his head on the shoulder of his divine Master, and the repulsive and treacherous Judas, with unkempt red hair, putting his hand in the dish in the centre, for, as is well-known, he had not a vestige of good-breeding.

On Holy Thursday the "Supper" was carried

* Little saints, pretty and cheap,
They neither eat, nor drink, nor wear out shoes.

in procession, having, on the preceding evening, been exposed in the "square" for the adoration of the faithful, who, with this object, had free entrance to the house—a ceremony which was then and is still called "to visit the insignia," and there was scarcely a single inhabitant of the town, not to speak of strangers, who did not visit them on the eve of the procession.

The table at which Christ and the apostles were seated was large, and, on these solemn occasions, was covered with a fine German damask tablecloth, and adorned with a profusion of beautiful flowers, meats, sweet dishes, and fruits. Although there was not on the table "a specimen of everything that God created," as the country people in their extravagant enthusiasm declared, it was undeniable that there were on it many rare and costly objects—kid's heart grapes, fresh as if they had been just gathered, or had been preserved by a miracle; large clusters of carnations and early sweet-scented roses; bunches of violets and camellias, &c. The walls of the apartment in which was the "Supper" were hung with crimson damask; on the damask were fastened beautiful antique cornucopias in which were set lighted wax candles; and there were, besides, in the apartment, growing plants, and canaries in cages, and an enormous black wooden cross, with ornaments and edges of fine silver, attached to the wall by fine hooks. This was the cross which Don Acisclo, when he was a young man, had for many successive

years carried on his shoulder in the processions, for he had been and was still a Brother of the Cross, although he was now superannuated, and he still dressed himself as a Nazarene and walked in the procession before the "Supper," as a brother of the Order, wearing a rich purple silk tunic which had cost a fortune. On those occasions, however, he did not carry the cross, but a shining pole—a symbol of authority and command. His eldest son walked before him, bearing the standard of the brotherhood.

The sum spent by Don Acisclo on the festival was large, for he defrayed the cost of the huge wax candles carried by those who followed his insignia; and on the evening of Holy Thursday, when the procession was over, he gave a supper to the members of the fraternity, who were numerous, placing before them an abundance of bean pottage, spiced cornucopias, tope with garlic sauce, codfish dressed with tomatoes or made into balls, and sometimes even fried *seraphim*, for, strange as it may sound, anchovies are in that part of the country called *seraphim*; and, for dessert, delicious fritters and old wine. He rewarded liberally, besides, the forty or fifty porters who carried on their shoulders the platform on which was placed the table with Christ and the apostles and "everything that God created"—a titanic undertaking, which left many of the bearers with sprains and frightful blisters, notwithstanding the cushions they used to protect the flesh.

On that night Don Acisclo scattered about with open hands the contents of the larder. The common people smoked, at his cost, the best cigars to be had at the tobacconist's, and the people of quality drank chocolate and ate pancakes, tarts, and sweet cakes of various kinds, such as oil cakes and rusks made of wine and egg. Always, and on every occasion, Don Acisclo showed himself in all things generous and opulent.

The court-yard of the house was large and was paved with marble. In the middle was a marble basin into which fell a shower of clear water from a tall jet rising in its centre. Surrounding the fountain were many pots of flowers and sweet-scented herbs, and around these again were flower beds bordered with box cut in the shape of spheres and pyramids, and climbing rose bushes, jasmines, and orange trees which grew against the walls, running along the balconies of the principal story, weaving a mantle of flowers, fruits, and verdure, and embalming the air with the perfume of orange blossoms, mingled with the delicate odour of the jasmine and the musk roses.

This court-yard, as well as a more extensive garden, which was in part an orchard, situated at the rear of the house, was tended carefully by Doña Luz. She even sent for many foreign plants, until then unknown in Villafria, and acclimatised them there.

Doña Luz attended to nothing else in the house—not through indolence, but because, ac-

according to what Don Acisclo said, she persisted in regarding herself as a guest, and did not wish to undertake duties which she might find difficulty in performing.

She who directed everything—the real manager and housekeeper—was the Señora Petra, a woman of about fifty years of age. She kept an account of the daily expenses, superintended the kitchen, and had charge of the keys of the pantry, the plate closet, the cask room, the wine, oil, brandy, and vinegar cellars, and the granaries, where were always stores of wheat, barley, pease, vetches, anise, and other grains.

Under the immediate orders of the Señora Petra were four servants—two young girls, tireless workers, hardy, robust, and vigorous—called in that part of the country “house servants,” that is to say, servants whose duty it was to scrub, mop up the floors, white-wash the walls, and keep everything in the house dazzlingly clean; another woman, older, although still young, who sewed, mended, and ironed the linen, and another who cooked the most savoury dishes of the country, and who was skilled in the art of making syrups, curds, pastry, conserves and honey-cakes.

All this feminine flock lodged and slept on the main floor of the country house, in which lived also the farmer and his wife, with their four children—these latter, however, in so remote a part of the building that they were never seen or heard, except when called by the master.

Finally, there was a boy who slept near the stable, of which, as well as of the courts and poultry yard, he had the care.

Such was what may be called the domestic service of the house. But it is to be understood that the labourers employed by the day—the muleteer, the caretakers, the labourers in the vineyard, the grape-pressers, the labourers engaged in the mill, and the field labourers—came in and out, and lodged at the country house which was spacious, and where there was a still, a wine-press, a mill-stone, and presses for the olives and the grapes.

In the master's house lived, as I have said, only Don Acisclo, Doña Luz, and Juana, the maid of the latter.

Tomás, the former servant of the marquis, lived in the ancestral house with a boy who assisted him in taking care of it, and also in taking care of the señorita's handsome black horse.

In the house two tables were set, one for Don Acisclo and Doña Luz and such guests as there might chance to be; the other for the *family* (in the towns and villages of Andalusia the servants are still called the *family*). At this table, at which the Señora Petra presided, sat the two house servants, the seamstress and laundress, the cook, the stable-boy, Tomás, and his assistant, and Juana, the maid of Doña Luz.

The farmer and his family had a separate table,

the farmer's wife preparing their food on a little Moorish cooking-stove.

This did not prevent the latter from being frequently invited, with some or all of her children, and even the farmer himself, to the family table, at which also ate the muleteer and others of the men employed by Don Acisclo, when in the town, and to which the Señora Petra and Juana arrogated to themselves the right—a right which they did not neglect to exercise—to invite whatever guests they might choose.

Such was the household in which Doña Luz had lived for twelve years, and such were the people by whom she was surrounded in the May of 1860.

IV

THE INTIMATE FRIENDS OF DOÑA LUZ

DOÑA LUZ, considering her disposition and the circumstances in which she was placed, could not live otherwise than as she lived.

Pride is no doubt reprehensible.

How much more admirable and more Christian a trait is humility. In pride there is a large mixture of selfishness, while humility is all self-sacrifice and devotion. And yet it is undeniable that a just pride is at times the source of exalted virtues and an incentive to noble exertions.

Be this as it may, we cannot conceal the fact that our heroine was extremely proud.

The narrator of this story, far from having any prejudices in favour of aristocracy, has always been of the opinion that the humblest rustic is of as much real worth as the haughtiest courtier. *Mutatis mutandis*, one man seems to him the equal of another. The wife of an alcalde is the equal of an empress or a queen ; the wife of a notary is the equal of the most fashionable duchess

in Madrid ; and, to his way of thinking, young So-and-so is more high-minded, a better horse-man, more charming and agreeable in his manners, and a more interesting companion than the most finished dandy he has ever known.

Yet, looking into the matter more closely, this is not the true democratic spirit, but rather a black and gloomy pessimism. An optimistic and healthy democratic spirit would without doubt lead us to believe that a good education from infancy, the good example and the good name of parents and ancestors, the duty incumbent upon us to preserve this good name free from dishonour or reproach, and more urbane and cultured surroundings should be discipline and incentive sufficient to be virtuous or prudent, or agreeable or honourable, or all these admirable things together. With like natural qualities and intellectual endowments, consequently, the possessor of the before-mentioned external advantages should be greatly the superior of him who does not possess them. With equal natural advantages the daughter of a marquis, for instance, should conduct herself better than the daughter of a nobody. To take a different view of the democratic spirit would be to imply that what we ought to desire is equality by descent, not by ascent, equality in ignorance, abjectness, and misery, and not equality in the highest possible elevation, in the possession of all those means, all that accumulation of resources made by past generations, to the end that by their help we may

continue progressing toward goodness, knowledge, and beauty.

I can regard as worthy of all respect, and little less than holy, although it should seek to attain its end by crooked ways, the democratic or even socialistic purpose of the demagogue whose aim it is to bestow upon all men the liberal education, the wealth, and all the other advantages enjoyed by so-called aristocrats, if those advantages are to be employed, not for enjoyment only, but for the improvement of character ; but if they are to be used only for enjoyment, and their possession results in making men more effeminate, worthless, and corrupt, then I find fewer arguments in favour of the democracy of progress than of the democracy of Rousseau, which aims at bringing men back to a state of nature.

In any case, however, be it understood that I have no desire to defend either of these systems here. I am not writing a treatise on political philosophy, nor is it my purpose to represent Doña Luz as a model of all the virtues, but to represent her as she was.

Doña Luz had a profound consciousness of her own dignity as a human being, but she supposed that her superiority in this respect to those around her was due, not to natural endowment only, but to the fact of her having received a better and more careful education than they. This seems modesty rather than pride. She had formed for herself an ideal which she believed she must strive

to realise, and which she had, in part, realised and developed, as it were, thanks, no doubt, to her own efforts, but aided also by the favourable circumstances of her rank and her surroundings, in which she was more fortunate than most people, and for which she was indebted to Providence. She deemed that she was more favoured by heaven than others, and that consequently she had more duties than others to fulfill. For each divine favour she had received there was a corresponding obligation ; she had talent, she was in duty bound to cultivate it. She was beautiful and healthy, it was obligatory on her to preserve her beauty and her health. She was the inheritor of an illustrious name, and if she could not succeed in conferring greater lustre upon it, it was her duty at least to avoid tarnishing it.

Although she regarded other human beings as her equals by nature, she considered humanity, as a whole, as in a state of constant progress toward serener and more luminous heights. If, though but by a caprice of fate, she had advanced farther on the road and was nearer the summit than many others, she conceived her duty, as a lover of her kind, to be limited to extending her hand to those who were on the way to reach the heights she had already attained, and not to those who were so far beneath her or so sunk in the mire that by seeking to aid them, instead of raising them, she should herself be drawn down into the mire also.

We have already intimated that the pride of Doña Luz concealed itself under the most amiable exterior, and this, not through prudence or self-interest, but through a lively sentiment of charity. Nothing was more painful to her than to humiliate a fellow-being. If she sometimes took pleasure in displaying a particular accomplishment, some intellectual endowment, or personal gift or grace, it was in the presence of those who might profit by the stimulus of her example and seek to raise themselves to her level, not with the desire of exciting either envy or profitless admiration.

Doña Luz, for the very reason that she was so proud, had not a spark of vanity. She liked in all things to return with usury what she had received. She did not desire to be loved by others better than she loved them. Coquetry was consequently a vice unknown and almost incomprehensible to her. Her own good opinion, the favourable judgment pronounced by herself upon any of her acts, qualities, or virtues, flattered and pleased her more than the applause of those who surrounded her. Thus it was that if she delighted to please it was through pure goodness of heart; from which resulted a naturalness, a modesty, and an apparent forgetfulness of her own merits which charmed and surprised.

Women in general are eager to inspire love. Doña Luz sought to avoid doing so, and contrived by some timely act or word to stifle this feeling at its birth in every heart where she suspected its

existence. Why should she wish to be loved if she could not return the affection of those who loved her? In love, as in friendship, Doña Luz desired to give back double measure. And finding that there was no one in Villafria whom she could love, she had comported herself in such a way as to cause the young men of the town gradually to withdraw from her society, and had chosen her intimate friends among the old men of the place.

Although amiable toward every one, her manners were so studiously courteous, that, without drawing on herself the reproach of pride, she had succeeded in avoiding intimacy with any excepting only four persons.

The first of these was Don Miguel, the parish priest, an old man of excellent disposition, but of extremely limited intelligence, to whom she made her confession every month, to whom she gave her savings to be distributed in alms among the poor, and with whom she often played *tute*. The heart and mind of Doña Luz were for the poor priest the book with the seven seals. In this ignorance of her merits, and being, besides, of a not very enthusiastic nature, Don Miguel's affection for Doña Luz was moderate, but it was as strong as the capacity of his soul for affection admitted, which was not great. Doña Luz, on the other hand, idolised the priest, in a certain sense. She delighted in the transparent simplicity of his nature, in his neatness, in his

innocent vacuity of spirit, and she petted and spoiled him as if he were a little child. Availing herself of the services of a smuggler who brought cotton goods from Lisbon to Villafria, she obtained from the former place for Don Miguel the choicest snuff, and, managing so that they should not prove injurious to him, she sent him sweetmeats, biscuits and other dainties, of which the priest was very fond.

Another intimate friend, of more importance than the priest, was the doctor of the place, Don Anselmo. And I say of more importance, because of his personal merits, not because Doña Luz stood in need of his services. The health of Doña Luz was arrogantly good. She had never even so slight an ailment as a headache.

Don Anselmo possessed a clear intelligence, and was not only a learned and skilful physician, but also a man of varied information and of singular eloquence. It may seem strange that with these gifts he should have remained all his life a doctor in a country town. Either fortune had never smiled upon him, or his harsh and intractable nature had stood in the way of his advancement. However this may be, he had resigned himself to end his days in the practice of his profession in Villafria.

Doña Luz and Don Anselmo were mutually charmed with each other. For this there were various reasons. Now that *schemas* are in fashion, we may represent the spirits of the doctor and

the señorita as two eccentric spheres, touching and intersecting each other on one side where they formed wide segments united at their base—something similar to humanity in the *schema* of being, to the *lens* which the Krausists have rendered so famous. Don Anselmo and Doña Luz, then, had a spiritual lens in common in which they understood each other perfectly, the rest of the sphere of each remaining unknown to and unexplored by the other. Thus it was that they never came to know each other by heart—a rock on which minds of similar bent often split—which in the end is apt to engender tedium and dislike.

These two friends had always an unexplored field in which to make excursions and discoveries, each penetrating or seeking to penetrate into the mind of the other. They were never tired of conversing together, and their conversation was one continual dispute. Doña Luz was a believer and an idealist, with a tinge of mysticism; Don Anselmo a fierce materialist. Don Anselmo was, besides, an indefatigable talker, and nothing delighted him more than to have a listener. They rested from their disputes only when they played chess. They were in the habit of playing one or two games together every day.

Don Anselmo was at this time about sixty years old. Like Don Acisclo he was a widower, and he had a daughter of twenty, a charming brunette, petite and slender, still unmarried, called

Doña Manolita and nicknamed "the Snake-like." This name had been given her on account of the extraordinary quickness and agility of her movements. They said in the town that she was formed and compounded, as it were, of lizards' tails. She was constantly saying or doing something ridiculous, though she never, either in act or speech, transgressed the bounds of propriety, for which reason she was also called "the Thunder-clap"; but she was in reality not a thunder-clap, but a whirlwind of bursts of laughter, of merry jests and of entertaining speeches, for she was no less talkative than her father. In other respects the character of Manolita could not be improved upon. She was loyal, affectionate, incapable of malice or envy, quick-witted, and more thoughtful and judicious in important matters than might have been supposed from her apparent giddiness.

As Doña Luz was serious and composed by nature, she found in Doña Manolita's character the complement of her own. This it was, no doubt, which influenced her in making the doctor's daughter her companion. Doña Manolita was the only person in Villafria whom Doña Luz addressed as "thou." She did not yet repose absolute confidence in her, for Doña Luz was extremely reserved, but day by day Doña Manolita won upon her affections. They walked together, they went to church together, they sat side by side at the reunions which they attended. Doña Manolita copied Doña Luz in her dress and in

her mode of wearing her hair, and came and went at her bidding. Doña Manolita used to say that she was for Doña Luz what the comic servant is to the lover of the domestic drama, and as in several of the best of these dramas this servant is called Polilla, she used to say to Doña Luz, "My dear, I am your Polilla."

With regard to Don Acisclo Doña Luz entertained the same opinion as her father had done, and did not cherish toward him the slightest feeling of resentment because he had enriched himself with the fortune of her ancestors. If the marquis had been resolved upon ruining himself, how was Don Acisclo to blame for it? Guided by a more refined morality, of which Don Acisclo could have no knowledge, the steward might possibly have been able to save the fortune of the marquis; he might possibly have prolonged the splendour of the house for an additional ten years, but to expect this morality in Villafria was to expect impossibilities. It was sufficient for Doña Luz, therefore, in order to be profoundly grateful to Don Acisclo, to entertain the firm persuasion she entertained, that with any other steward of Villafria, her father's ruin would have taken place ten years sooner than it had done, and she herself would not have been brought up, like an elegant lady, in the lap of luxury, with her English governess and all the care befitting her station. God alone knew what would have become of her if the marquis had ruined himself and died of the

spleen, leaving her orphaned at the age of five, instead of fifteen.

And then Doña Luz liked Don Acisclo. She sympathised with his activity, his industry, and the other virtues which were conspicuous in his character.

For the sake of appearances, Doña Luz had lived in Don Acisclo's house, without showing any wish to take up her residence in the ancestral house, until she had completed her twenty-second year. Subsequent to that time she had on several occasions expressed a desire to do so, but Don Acisclo had always gently and affectionately urged her to remain in his house. He told her that it would be a great grief to him to live alone, after having grown accustomed to her society, and he appealed also, somewhat grotesquely, to her regard for public opinion, saying that, as Doña Luz was a young girl, she ought not to act with the same independence as if she were an old maid, for, however discreet and austere might be her conduct, if she were to live alone some one would always be found to say of her that she was a "cow strayed from the herd."

Doña Luz, far from being offended, laughed at this not very complimentary comparison, and continued to reside in the house of the former steward.

And then Doña Luz enjoyed there complete independence.

Three or four rooms in the house had been set

apart for her exclusive use, and were furnished with exquisite taste. The only persons who had free access to these rooms were the four intimate friends already mentioned : Juana, her maid ; one of the house servants who attended to the rooms under Juana's superintendence, lest some object of art, or valuable piece of furniture might be broken ; and finally three other living creatures, who were also partly friends of Doña Luz, and who completed or rounded the circle of her intimates. These three creatures were Tomás, her father's former servant and now her squire and companion in her horseback excursions ; Uncle Blas, the farmer whom she employed to take care of her property, which she herself managed, and which had increased in value so greatly as to have produced in a few years of abundant harvests almost twenty thousand reals ; and an enormous white greyhound, Palomo, who was all sweetness, docility, and gentleness with his mistress, but who displayed the utmost fierceness to those whom he suspected of wishing to hurt or annoy her.

In addition to this daily companionship, Doña Luz often took part in reunions of a more general character. The sons, daughters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law of Don Acisclo, with their numerous children, their fathers-in-law and their mothers-in-law, godfathers and godmothers, formed a multitude with whom it was necessary to mingle occasionally. They were all insignificant and by no means entertaining ; they were mediocre, in

every sense, and Doña Luz worked wonders of diplomacy to avoid their company without offending them.

On the saint's day and the birthday of each member of Don Acisclo's family there was a patriarchal banquet in the house, with much merry-making and dancing. Doña Luz made it a point to be present at these entertainments, and generally succeeded in charming everybody by her amiability and gaiety.

V

THE FRIENDSHIP OF DOÑA MANOLITA

THE life led by Doña Luz, however, was so regular, so monotonous, so exempt from anything to distinguish one day from another, that one year had followed another, leaving in her mind only a confused recollection of their events, like that of a dream.

This sort of existence has for every one the charm of peace. For Doña Luz it possessed a still higher charm.

When her mind was occupied with thoughts, or her soul with desires or emotions, she had no consciousness of her external surroundings ; she dwelt in an ideal world in which there is neither time nor space. So that, although the mind and heart of Doña Luz, who differed in no wise from other mortals in this respect, were unable to embrace all things at once, yet, as the causes of her profoundest thoughts and her intensest emotions belonged to no determinate point on our planet, nor any fixed moment in time, these thoughts and

emotions also were exempt from the laws of time and space, and seemed to have their goal in an immutable eternity.

I should be sorry to be misunderstood on this point, and I will try to make my meaning clearer, although in doing so I may err by diffuseness. Doña Luz was no mystic dreamer; she was very far from living in a state of continual ecstasy. She saw, understood, and appreciated all that passed around her in the actual world, but the incidents and events that took place in Villafria interested her less, although they passed under her immediate observation, than did the incidents and events described in history, novels, or poetry, or even those which she drew from her own fancy at times. Neither did Doña Luz possess a heart of stone, but a heart which was very compassionate and tender toward her fellow-beings. She pitied, relieved, and consoled them in their troubles as far as was in her power, and in this she expended a part of her energy. But as her energy was great, and extended far beyond the limits of Villafria, into the limits of the infinite, in fact, the result was that the most intimate and essential part of her life, the interests which most nearly concerned her, were not in Villafria, and consequently were nowhere. Therefore, without being a dreamer, she lived in a dream.

No matter how exalted an idea we may wish to convey of another's kindness of heart, we do not go so far as to say that the most important

epochs of his existence are marked by the day on which his opposite neighbour's son died of the small-pox, or by the night on which the farmhouse of the farmer with whom he chanced to enter into conversation during a walk or coming out of church one day was burned down. To mark those epochs in our lives, events are necessary which touch ourselves more nearly. For Doña Luz there had been no epoch of this kind since the death of her father. It is true that she attached but little importance to a multitude of things with which other women concern themselves, occupying their minds with details apparently the most insignificant.

There is no trait in my opinion more peculiarly distinctive of the feminine mind than this. I confess that I am struck dumb with amazement when I hear women relating incidents, events, or conversations. There is not a detail which they have forgotten. "He said"—and they tell all he said. "And the other answered"—and they repeat word for word what he answered. "And then the first one replied"—and not a single letter of the reply is misplaced. The hearer might fancy that they had taken down a faithful and circumstantial report on the spot of all that had happened. Not so Doña Luz, upon whose mind very few occurrences made any strong impression.

Those things that most enchanted, delighted, and moved her were the same to-day as yesterday,

the same this year as last—the return of spring, a starry sky, the moonlight, the dawn, the fragrance and the beauty of the flowers, music, poetry, and similar things, which are of all time.

Even the friendship existing between Doña Luz and the doctor, the priest, and Don Acisclo was unvarying—it always remained in the same state, without increase or diminution.

Only in her friendship with Doña Manolita, which continually increased in intensity, was there any variation.

It was a morning in May. We have already said that Doña Luz was an early riser. The doctor's daughter was also an early riser. At seven in the morning she entered her friend's little parlour, to which she had always free access.

If any man of the world, familiar with the life of Madrid, or any other of the great European capitals, and familiar also with the manner of life in our Andalusian towns and villages, had chanced at this moment to enter this little room, he would have been agreeably surprised, and might even have doubted the evidence of his senses.

The parlour of Doña Luz was as comfortable and elegant as the parlour of the lady most *comme il faut* of Madrid, while at the same time it had certain attractions peculiar to the country and to the place.

Two windows opened out on the orchard, where were to be seen acacias, dark elms, flowers, fruit trees, now in blossom, and brilliant verdure

In the parlour itself, too, were plants and flowers growing in porcelain vases. A large cage contained a multitude of birds, which filled the room with their joyous trills and carols. Doña Luz also had two beautiful antique desks, with little drawers and columns inlaid with ivory, ebony, and mother-of-pearl ; comfortable arm-chairs and a sofa ; a French fireplace of better construction than the others in the house ; mirrors, fine paintings, and a bookcase full of richly bound books.

Above her writing-table was hung the finest of her pictures, or at least that which Doña Luz esteemed the most. Various attributes and emblems of the Passion were represented in it—the nails, the crown of thorns, the ladder, the cock and lance of Longinus. In the centre of the picture was the cross, and around the cross a variety of flowers, exquisitely painted. It was not the picture itself, however, that gave this object so high a value in the eyes of Doña Luz ; it was what the picture concealed. Touching a spring, the painting we have described moved aside like a door, disclosing to view another painting of far superior merit, a painting at once horrible and beautiful. It was a figure of Christ, half length, of wonderful beauty of conception and delicate and elaborate execution. The hairs on the head and in the beard could almost be counted, the regularity and noble symmetry of the features inspired love and veneration, but the suffering of the crucifixion, the horrors of the agony, were

revealed in the thin and emaciated countenance, the breast and the side wounded by the lance. It was a dead Christ. The right hand showing the livid wound made by the nail, rested on the fleshless breast. The wounds made by the thorns, still bleeding, were visible in the temples, the mouth was half open, the lips livid, the eyelids, drooping although not entirely closed, allowed the fixed and glassy eyes to be seen. The painter had succeeded in uniting, with marvellous inspiration, the image of a creature in the agonies of dissolution with the superhuman image assumed by God himself.

Some learned art critics attributed this picture to the divine Morales, others said that it was by a pupil of Morales, and not by the master himself. However this may be, the picture had been long in the possession of the family, and was one of the few objects of value which the marquis had not sold.

The picture was of such a character that a woman of less robust health or of less strength of mind than Doña Luz would not have kept it in her room and contemplated it with so much frequency as she did. Love for the divine representation of Christ would have been mingled with terror and with an intense pity which might have brought on an hysterical attack or even delirium. But Doña Luz was very peculiar, and found a strange delight in the prolonged contemplation of this picture, in which were depicted the

most profound mystery and the attributes of humanity most opposed to each other—all the beatitude, all the beauty, all the celestial radiance of which the flesh is capable, united to a pure soul, the temple and dwelling-place of the Eternal, and all the pain, the weakness, the pitiable suffering, and the sickening corruption to which flesh is heir.

Doña Luz had found this terrible picture discreetly concealed by the other, and thus she had preserved it, causing it to be brought from her own house to her apartment in the house of Don Acisclo. She scarcely ever showed it to any one, but she herself, who, in her active and tireless spirit had strange and contradictory tendencies, after galloping recklessly on her black horse for two or three hours, and then having seen with enjoyment his beautiful limbs, which the violent exercise had covered with sweat, bathed and rubbed down, overflowing with health, in all the vigour of her youth, and the bloom of her living beauty, would be seized by ascetic impulses, and uncovering the picture she would gaze long at it, and tears would spring to her eyes, and her rosy lips would murmur inarticulately prayers of ineffable tenderness.

On the morning of which we speak there was nothing of asceticism in Doña Luz, or at least, if there was, there was no evidence of it in her appearance. She was attired in an elegant morning gown, and her fair hair, not yet dressed,

was gathered up in an invisible net. Reclining languidly in her easy chair, she was reading two books alternately. They were the works of Calderon and of Alfred de Musset. She was comparing the manner in which those two authors had put in dramatic action the saying, "There is no trifling with love"—*Ou ne badine pas avec l'amour.*

She had not been led to make this study by a purely speculative fondness for literary criticisms, but by a case in point which something more than two months before had come under her observation, and which greatly interested her.

Pepe Güeto, a young man about thirty years of age, was the son of a rich farmer of Villafria. There was no one in the whole province more steady, sober, and sensible than he. The follies of Doña Manolita and her somewhat exaggerated gaiety of spirit shocked him greatly, and he was constantly censuring them. He had gone so far as to say that if Doña Manolita were in any way connected with him—his wife, for instance—he would beat out of her the lizard's tails, even if in order to do so it should be necessary to employ a good rattan. Doña Manolita, on the other hand, who was aware of all this, used to say that Pepe Güeto was a great braggart, but that he was not without a certain amount of culture, that he would never be capable of striking a woman, and that if he should ever be her husband, instead of beating her, he would allow himself to be beaten, and

would be the model of hen-pecked husbands. The doctor's daughter added that excessive gravity, especially in young men, is apt to be mistaken for stupidity, and that she was worth very little if she could not drive the seriousness out of Pepe Güeto as devils are driven out of one possessed, and that if he were not already a fool she was resolved to drive him out of his senses and make him commit a thousand follies.

These threats, in their turn, reached the ear of Pepe Güeto, whence it resulted that whenever the pair met they got into fresh disputes, he censuring her giddiness and want of circumspection, she ridiculing his gravity and calling him a fool. The anger and spite of both increased to such a degree that now merely casual encounters were not sufficient to enable them to give full vent to their feelings, and they would seek occasion to meet each other in order to renew their disputes and heap abuse upon each other. These quarrels generally terminated by Pepe Güeto saying, "If I had the misfortune to be your husband I would soon bring you to reason;" and with Doña Manolita answering: "If I were to commit the folly of marrying as stupid a man as you, I would either make you as lively as a cricket, or I would renounce for ever the reputation I enjoy."

Pepe Güeto and Doña Manolita took so great a pleasure in these quarrels, disputes, and recriminations that they now indulged in them several times every day.

All this had given food for thought to Doña Luz, who had a strong affection for Doña Manolita, and was the occasion of her now reading the dramas we have mentioned, having previously read again a drama of Shakespeare, in which the same subject is treated in a more masterly manner.

Doña Luz was absorbed in her reading when, as we have said, Doña Manolita entered her room.

After they had embraced each other and kissed each other, and cordially bade each other good morning, the doctor's daughter spoke as follows :

"My dear, you must be the first to hear the news ; you shall hear it even before my father. Great news ! My fights with Pepe Güeto have ceased to be skirmishes. The madness of both of us has reached its height. We have challenged each other to mortal combat."

"What do you mean by that ?" asked Doña Luz.

"I mean," replied her friend, "that in order to settle the question as to whether I am to drive him crazy or he is to make me sensible, we have made up our minds to be married. It is true, indeed, that he acknowledges himself beaten for the time, and says that the very fact of his wishing to marry me proves him to be out of his mind, and that even without our marrying I have already won the wager, but he adds that for that

very reason he wishes to marry me in order to have his revenge and to compensate himself for his defeat. I answer with the saying: 'What I am sorry for is not that my son has lost, but that he wants to win back his money,' and I tell him that if he continues the game he will come out of it tearing his hair, and I warn him that his defeat will be still more complete when he is married. But the insolent and audacious fellow refuses to take the warning, and is determined to rush blindly to his fate. This very day, more valiant than the Cid Campeador himself, he is going to ask my father for this lily-white hand, which will take hold of the reins and compel him to depart from his slow and gentle pace, like that of a canon's mule, and jump about more briskly than your beautiful black horse."

Doña Luz, who could never conceal her feelings, which showed themselves in her countenance as the white pebbles at the bottom of a lake show themselves through its still, clear waters, manifested dissatisfaction rather than pleasure at the announcement, already anticipated by her, of her friend's contemplated marriage.

"Why, what is the matter?" exclaimed Doña Manolita. "Are you sorry that I am going to be married? The informal manner of my engagement does not please you, perhaps. You do not understand the question, simpleton. Do you not see that this barbarian, this egoist of a Pepe Güeto, fancies—and not without reason—that he is a

splendid fellow, and all the anger he has cherished, and still cherishes toward me, is based upon the fact that he had set his mind upon my falling in love with him for his gravity and seriousness, and taking, myself, to sighing and crying without any thought of amusement or pleasure or anything but him? Do you not see that he is in love with me, and that all his anger is because he does not think me equally in love with him, or capable of being so, because I do not make grimaces and annoy every one with my tears and my sentimentalities? And do you not understand, finally, that I am in love with him? Otherwise, would I marry him? Once married, when my natural shyness with him shall have worn off, I will show him my affection, and he shall learn what a treasure there is of it in my soul, although hidden under an appearance of levity and frivolity. And when he sees this treasure and appreciates it and knows that it is his, and more precious than he could ever have imagined it to be, he will see that my heart is not made of cork, but of honey and sugar, and he will become as sweet as honey and sugar himself, and he will laugh and dance for joy, declaring and confessing that gaiety of heart is compatible with true love, and laughter with the deepest and truest happiness."

Doña Luz, smiling and sighing at the same time, answered thus:

"My sadness did not spring from any doubts concerning your future, but from my own selfish

feelings, which in the end, however, I shall learn to conquer. I foresee that you will be happy, and this rejoices me; but I am jealous of your friendship. Why should I not confess it? The only person whom I have admitted to my heart, to whom I have little by little given my affection, is yourself. You have repaid me with usury, I know, but you are now going to have a husband; soon, perhaps, you will have children, and all your affections will be centred on them. Poor I will be left alone in the world, without a soul to understand or love me."

Doña Manolita tenderly embraced Doña Luz, and answered her in the following words:

"Even if I had not a thousand other reasons to rejoice at my approaching marriage, I should rejoice now, because it has made you declare your friendship for me in the most explicit manner and in a way you have never done before. It fills me with pride and happiness that you should value my friendship so highly. Do not fear that either Pepe Güeto or the little Güetos who may make their appearance in the future will rob you of the profound affection I entertain for you. What! Do you suppose that the compartment, spot, or corner in my soul in which is situated my affection as a wife and mother was empty before, and is now going to be filled? Do you not think this love existed in my heart before I loved Pepe Güeto? Most assuredly it did. Only the lover or husband to whom I had consecrated it was an

ideal, a being made to order, full of impossible perfections. The children I dreamed of, and whom I still dream of, are little cherubim. No matter how great the merits of Pepe Güeto, you may be sure he will be a hundred leagues removed from the husband I have dreamed of. And as for the children, the difference will be still greater, for those I may have—if I should have any, which I hope and desire may be the case—will not be impeccable and celestial, as I pictured them to myself, but fretful, mischievous, dirty, and headstrong, making me angry a thousand times a day, and quarrelling a thousand times a day among themselves, all which will tend to diminish my affection for them. Consequently, married and with children, I shall love you more than I have done unmarried, if you continue loving me. If you were to marry would you cease to love me?"

"I shall never cease to love you," answered Doña Luz. "I shall never marry."

This latter affirmation greatly excited the curiosity and awakened the interest of Manolita, and as their friendship had now reached its culminating point, there followed various confidences and revelations on the part of Doña Luz, in the course of a colloquy which, from its importance, deserves a separate chapter.

VI

THE CONFIDENCES OF DOÑA LUZ

IT was the doctor's daughter who invited these confidences, saying to Doña Luz :

"And why should you never marry? I do not deny that I regard it as improbable, but I do not think it impossible that you should do so. It is improbable, because in the country here there is no one worthy to be your lover, and you are not going to Madrid or to any other great city in search of a lover. It is not suited to your rank or your character to go in search of an establishment, either living under the protection of some relation whose friendly offers you have perhaps already repulsed, or alone and independent now that you are of age."

"There is no need for me to answer your question," said Doña Luz ; "you yourself have already done so. Our friendship should to-day receive its confirmation, however. I wish to stamp it with the seal of truth, by laying open to you my heart, and disclosing to you all its secrets. I shall have

no fear that you will think me vain for what I am going to say, or that it will lessen your esteem for me. I shall show myself to you as I am. I will confess to you what I have never before confessed, to any one. This corner, this spot in the soul where you say you have cherished the love of husband and children, I, too, have it in my soul. But a pride that is not founded on reason, a repugnance springing from the manner in which I have been educated prevent my marrying——”

“A second Pepe Güeto, for instance,” interrupted Manolita.

“Pepe Güeto is honourable, good, intelligent, and richer than I am,” replied Doña Luz. “I should be a fool to scorn a man like him, if my scorn were founded on reason; but these things are not reasoned out; they are felt, and the fact is that no man in Pepe Güeto’s circumstances would desire me for a wife, as I, on my side, would not desire such a man for a husband. Understand that I speak now from a common-sense point of view merely, putting romance altogether out of the question. This, indeed, might work such a miracle that not merely a man like Pepe Güeto, but the lowest day labourer, might raise his eyes to me with a reasonable hope of obtaining me for his wife, and I should accept his proposals and marry him, even were I, not to say the daughter of a ruined marquis, but a princess and a millionaire. Fortunately, or unfortunately, either those beings with gifts and qualities superior

to their station do not exist, proving that Nature has made men more equal than is generally supposed, or that, if there are such beings, they are not destined for me, or that I am not gifted with sufficient imagination to endow some one who does not possess them with all those charms which should cause me to fall in love with him. Thus it is that the potency of love is dormant in my soul, as it were, but not dead. God forbid that I should destroy any faculty in my soul with which He Himself has endowed me! Love sleeps in my heart. It is the part of my reason, serene and cold, to see that no one awakens it but him who has the right to do so. But thus far no one has come to awaken it, and I fear that its sleep is destined to be eternal."

"Well," said Manolita, "I am sorry for a foolish remark I made just now. What would there be unseemly or wrong in your going where you would be seen and admired in order that some one worthy of you should come to awaken that precious love that sleeps in your breast? I almost think that you would not only be right in doing so, but that it would be your duty to do so. It is not just that so much beauty (and that you are beautiful no one can deny), it is not right that so much distinction and elegance should remain buried in a country town. It is cruel that so great a treasure of affection should sleep away its existence, grow old, and perhaps in the end have its wings moth-eaten. There are, doubtless, a thousand

handsome lovers in the great world ready to fall at your feet and and worship you if they could only see you. Doubtless, there will be one among them whom you can love. But how are they to guess that you are here? Why should you play at hide-and-seek with them?"

"In the first place, because in seeking for romance I must not begin by destroying romance. Love is not to be sought; it must appear suddenly, it must flash upon the sight as if it came down from heaven. Fortune may be sought, adventures may be sought, business may be sought, and, as you just now said, an establishment may be sought, but love is not to be sought. And, then, where should I go that I should not feel myself less at home and more isolated than in Villafria? Where should I present myself that I would not be looked upon as an adventuress? My relations would try to humiliate me if I were to live with them. If I lived alone people would say, with Don Acisclo, that I was like 'a cow strayed from the herd.' I might, if I had so desired, be a marchioness, and I am not, nor do I wish to be one, because a title without means to support it is ridiculous. Here, where everybody knows me, I am the 'Señorita Doña Luz,' the 'little marchioness,' who still preserves her ancestral home, and who is universally esteemed and respected, for every one knows what her life has been for the last twelve years. In that outside world I should be a somewhat mysterious Doña Luz, of

whom everybody would imagine a thousand horrible things. They would begin by making one true statement in order to build upon it a thousand false ones. The truth would be that I am the daughter of a dissipated and ruined marquis and of a certain Antonia Gutierrez, a seamstress, with whom my father fell in love. Believe me, in no place could I be better situated than here, although I may be fated never to fall in love or to marry. Why should love lie always sleeping? I am inclined to believe that there are not different kinds of love, each with its particular object, but that love is one, and although its object may change, love itself does not change. If this be the case, as I hope it is, my love will awake one day and expend its force on the beauty of heaven, on God who created it, on the flowers, on poetry, and, who knows, but even on science provided that my narrow woman's brain be large enough to admit a knowledge of its great truths, its obscure mysteries, and its awe-inspiring problems."

"I do not know what answer to make you," responded Doña Manolita. "I see that in much of what you say you are right, but since you have confided in me and laid bare to me the hidden recesses of your soul, gratify my curiosity on one point—explain to me, if you can, certain things that seem to me extraordinary in your existence. No matter how improvident, how careless, your father might have been, however few the relations

and friends he might have had in the world, was there no one to whom he could confide you but Don Acisclo? You yourself, who had lived for fourteen years in Madrid, had you there no friend? Was there no one there who would have taken an interest in your fate?"

"The carelessness and the improvidence of my father could not have been greater than they were. This is sufficiently proved by his ruin; but, in addition to this, it will be enough for me, linking together the disconnected recollections of my childhood, to describe to you my mode of life in Madrid in order to make it plain to you that the best, perhaps the only thing my father could have done, was to confide me to the care of Don Acisclo. Until I had completed my fifth year I lived in the house of a lady who appeared to be in comfortable circumstances, called Doña Francisca. I have since thought of the possibility of this lady being my mother; but, although she treated me indeed with kindness and even with indulgence, it was evident, or must then have seemed so to me, judging by my confused recollections, that I was a stranger to her. She kept me in her house as a favour. She was unmarried. A handsome man, a friend of my father's, came to see her with frequency. My father came to see me, sometimes alone, sometimes in the company of the gentleman I have mentioned. The lady died, and my father then took me to his house, keeping me always with him until his death.

A few months after I had entered my father's house, where an elderly woman servant took care of me, the governess for whom my father had sent came from England and remained with me until a few days previously to our leaving Madrid for Villafria."

Doña Manolita, who was one of the best creatures in the world, and who both loved and admired Doña Luz, greatly pleased with the confidence of the latter and very much interested in her story, had listened to all this, seated in front of her friend, without so much as winking an eyelash.

The latter continued :

"My governess was duty personified, but, like duty, without warmth, without enthusiasm, and without affection. I am almost inclined to affirm that she never kissed me, never bestowed a caress upon me. In exchange, she taught me all she knew, and my father regarded me as a wonder of precocity—an infant prodigy of learning.

"The life of my father, although I did not know it at the time, I know now to have been extremely dissipated, and the very reverse of exemplary. He played, indulged in excesses of all kinds, and remained out every night till three or four o'clock in the morning. I was his refuge, as it were—his means of purification, his sacred consolation in his moments of dejection and sadness. He would call me to his room, and, shut in there with me, would caress me, kiss me, and, at times, weep over

me. Young as I was, I could neither myself discover, nor could I ask him to tell me the cause of his sadness.

"Many times since my father's death I have sought eagerly among his papers for something that might throw a light upon the mystery of my birth, but in vain. He had the habit of tearing up such of his letters as possessed any special interest, for he was careless, and feared to leave them where they might be read by others. The result of my search was unimportant—neither likeness nor letter, only this locket found upon his person after his death, but which bears neither crest nor cipher that might afford a clue to the mystery."

At the same time, Doña Luz drew from her bosom the locket of which she spoke.

"Since then I have worn the locket as a souvenir of my father. Inside, as you will see" (and, opening the locket, she showed its contents to Doña Manolita), "behind the glass, is a lock of hair fairer than mine. Did it belong to my mother, or to some one else in whom I have no concern? Who can say? The two servants of my father, whom I still keep, are both of them intelligent, but they both entered my father's service long after I was born, and it is certain that they know nothing. Juana came to wait upon me when I was ten years old. Three years afterward Tomás entered my father's service as his valet."

"And did nothing ever occur during your father's life-time which might serve to clear up the mystery of your birth?" asked Doña Manolita.

"A singular occurrence did take place during my father's life-time, when I was two years old," replied Doña Luz, "but an occurrence of so mysterious a nature that nothing can with certainty be inferred from it. It might or might not have had some connection with that event."

"And what was this occurrence, if I may ask the question?"

"One morning my father received a visit from a mysterious stranger whom he himself admitted. There was no reason for the servants to be surprised at this. My father was accustomed to receive visitors in this way, opening the door for them himself and shutting himself into his room with them. On the morning in question, about half an hour after the arrival of his visitor, the bell in my father's room was rung violently. The door of the room was open. The visitor had disappeared. The servants found my father lying stretched upon the floor, his breast pierced by an apparently mortal wound, a sword grasped in his hand, another sword, stained with blood, lying beside him. They said it was only by a miracle that his life was saved. It was never discovered why or by whom he had been wounded. My father refused to say more than that his adversary was not to be pursued; that the wound had been received in honourable combat. A strange duel,

indeed, to take place without seconds or witnesses, and without any one ever learning anything further about it than its almost tragic ending!"

"All this leads me to suppose," said Doña Manolita, "that you are the daughter of some great lady."

"I do not know," answered Doña Luz. "Before the law I am the daughter of Antonia Gutierrez, free when she united herself to my father. And it is better that my father should have told me nothing. How could he have sullied the innocent mind of a girl of fifteen by such confidences? My mind was already sufficiently disturbed by the catastrophe at Madrid before we took refuge here. We were obliged to sell all the furniture we had there in order to make up the sum necessary to pay the demands of the money lenders and the creditors. My father came here humiliated and dejected, and a short time afterward he died. With whom could I have returned to Madrid? What rôle should the beggared marchioness play in Madrid? The best thing possible for me to do was what I have done—to make my home here."

Thus did Doña Luz confide all her secrets to the physician's daughter.

The friendship of both the young women became closer from this time forth, and neither ever afterward had a secret from the other.

The marriage of Doña Manolita was celebrated with all possible haste. A month after she had

communicated the news of her engagement to her friend she was married.

Her prediction that her marriage would cause no diminution in her friendship for Doña Luz was fulfilled to the letter. Doña Manolita was a good prophetess.

What she had foretold with regard to Pepe Güeto was also fulfilled. He made no attempt to correct her vivacity, nor did she become more serious than she had been before her marriage ; but, in exchange, Pepe Güeto laughed like a fool, especially at his wife's jests, which amused him greatly, and at her laughter, which he found pleasantly contagious.

Meantime the days passed for Doña Luz without anything to break their monotony except the changes of the seasons. Spring passed, summer passed, and the month of October, the time of the vintage, arrived.

Don Acisclo must have had some very important piece of news to communicate to Doña Luz to cause him, engaged as he was in the vintage, to visit her in her apartments one morning, at as early an hour as Doña Manolita had done some months before.

The mail arrived in Villafria late at night and was distributed at daybreak.

Don Acisclo held in his hand an open letter which he was waving about with lively manifestations of satisfaction and delight.

VII

FATHER ENRIQUE

"WHAT has happened, Don Acisclo? What says your letter? What good news may it contain? Have you drawn a prize in the lottery?" asked Doña Luz.

"Better than that, child, better than that," answered Don Acisclo. "Read it yourself, and you will see," and he handed the letter to Doña Luz.

The latter at once recognised both the handwriting and the signature—"Enrique." It was from a nephew of Don Acisclo, the son of a deceased sister, a Dominican friar who had resided for some years past in the Philippine Islands.

As a general thing people who become rich by their own efforts refuse to believe in chance, fate, destiny, or luck; these seem to them unmeaning words behind which laziness, extravagance, recklessness, and folly strive to screen themselves. And for this reason they regard themselves as the most prudent, rational, ingenious, and wise persons

on the face of the globe. And it may be that they are in the right. I neither deny nor affirm this to be the case. All I wish to say is that such was Don Acisclo's way of thinking. He was very well satisfied with himself, and thought there was no one who possessed greater merit than he did. Every other species of glory seemed to him of less value than his own and of an inferior quality. Nevertheless, a species of glory that had something supernatural and ultramundane, if not in the means employed, at least in the end to be attained, and which had been acquired by a member of his own family, seemed to Don Acisclo to be of no slight value either ; and such was the glory of his nephew, Father Enrique, a glory which in a certain sense was shared by himself and all the family. It was, almost as much as the wealth he had acquired, a patent of nobility for the family.

Don Acisclo, then, idolised Father Enrique. He would say, with complacent pride, in speaking of him : " In our family we can turn our hands to anything—to sweeping as well as to scrubbing. I wanted to become a millionaire and I am one. Enrique had a fancy for a holy life, and we shall one day see him eminent in his calling." In order to prove the truth of his opinion and to justify his prediction, Don Acisclo would often relate some of the adventures of Father Enrique, so that Doña Luz had come to regard the priest as an acquaintance and friend, although he had not been in the town, or even in Europe, for the last twenty years.

He had not spent all these years in Manila, however. He had visited various heathen lands, diffusing there the light of the Gospel ; he had suffered almost incredible hardships ; he had braved great dangers, and had once come near meeting the glorious death of a martyr, escaping with his life only after cruel and prolonged sufferings.

It must be confessed that the details of these adventures as related by Don Acisclo had something grotesque in them. Fortunately, Father Enrique wrote to his uncle three or four times a year, and his uncle took delight in hearing Doña Luz read these letters aloud. In this way Doña Luz had learned that Father Enrique, in addition to being brave to heroism and enthusiastic and fervid in all his apostolic enterprises and acts, was a man of clear intelligence and singular prudence and discretion.

His physical strength was far from being equal to his spiritual energy, and although he was only forty years old, in his later letters he had complained gently of the broken state of his health, which prevented his engaging in active enterprises and even interfered to some extent with his studies.

The letter just received was very short and was written from Cadiz. Doña Luz read it aloud. It was as follows :

“MY DEAR UNCLE.—My health had become so seriously impaired in Manila that the physicians

there decided that it would be necessary for me to return to Europe for a prolonged stay. They assured me that my native air would completely re-establish my health. My companions insisted upon my leaving the country, and the archbishop himself ordered me to make the journey. Consequently there was no alternative. I left Manila, and, thanks to God, had a prosperous voyage. I have now been in Cadiz for three days, and already feel much stronger. The day after to-morrow I shall take the train for Villafria. I send affectionate remembrances to my cousins, my other relations and my friends, and to your guest, the Señorita Doña Luz.

“Your affectionate nephew, who loves you and desires to embrace you.”

Such was the cause of Don Acisclo's delight. He was going to embrace his saintly nephew, he was going to live with him, he was going to have the pleasure of showing him off before the admiring townspeople.

Doña Luz at once proposed to remove to her own house and resign her apartments in the house of Don Acisclo to his nephew.

To this proposition, however, Don Acisclo answered :

“By no means, child. On no account would I allow you to leave my house to go and live in that great empty house alone ; besides, so hasty a removal would upset my plans. I have a project

which, with your permission, we will put into execution. I know that Enrique likes solitude, that he may study and meditate undisturbed. Allow him to live in your house ; we can prepare a few rooms there for him in no time. Your house is close at hand. We can go there to take care of him if he should fall ill, and as long as he is well he will come to breakfast and dine and chat with us every day."

Doña Luz persisted in her wish to go to her own house ; but, as Don Acisclo continued to oppose it, she at last yielded and cordially placed her house at Father Enrique's disposal.

The railway station is two good leagues distant from Villafria, and Don Acisclo arranged that the family and friends should go there to receive Father Enrique with much pomp. In effect, there was not a vehicle in the town which they did not press into the service. There were three gigs, a covered waggon (the property of Don Acisclo), and two carts. The expedition was composed of the sons and sons-in-law, the daughters and daughters-in-law of Don Acisclo, the parish priest, the doctor, Doña Luz, Doña Manolita and Pepe Güeto, and various other persons. Those for whom there was no room in the vehicles went on horseback or on donkeys.

Father Enrique arrived safely and was received with acclamations by all the crowd on the platform of the railway station.

His entrance to the town was a triumph.

He had brought presents for every member of the family—for the men, abundance of cigars from the Philippine Islands; for the women, embroidered shawls, such as in my native place are called “crape shawls” and “Manila shawls” in Madrid, and exquisite Chinese fans ; for Don Acisclo he brought Japanese weapons ; and for Doña Luz a set of ivory chessmen elaborately carved.

Father Enrique established himself very comfortably and quietly in the house of the marquises of Villafria, where Tomás offered to wait upon him ; but Father Enrique had brought with him a Chinese servant named Ramon, who attended to his wants with the utmost solicitude.

VIII

FATHER ENRIQUE'S MANNER OF LIFE IN THE TOWN

WHEN the great event of Father Enrique's arrival had taken place ; when there was no one in the town who had not satisfied his curiosity regarding the priest's appearance ; when every one had heard him preach in the town church and found that his sermons were no more eloquent than those of other priests, but only easier to understand, plainer, simpler, and with fewer unintelligible words ; and when it was known that he neither related spicy anecdotes, nor played billiards nor *malilla*, nor was more entertaining than any one else, all Villafria returned once more to its normal condition.

Like a stone dropped into the depths of a lake, which troubles the surface of the water for a time, making ever-widening circles which presently disappear, and all is once more tranquil as before, and the stone is forgotten, so was it with Father Enrique after he had been three months in Villafria.

It is true, indeed, that he courted obscurity. If he performed works of charity as far as his limited means would allow, it was so secretly, that no one was aware of it; if, moved thereto by pity or a sense of duty, he gave any one advice, he did so with so much simplicity, citing so few texts and authorities in support of his opinions, that no one paid any heed to it, and there were even some who thought him incapable of giving advice requiring any nicety of judgment, accustomed as he had been to live among the savages in the Indies.

In short, Father Enrique either did not know how to do so, or did not care to make himself popular. He afforded one more instance of the truth of the scriptural saying, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country." It might also be said of him, if it be allowable to compare earthly things with heavenly, "He was among his own and they knew him not."

He did not go to the casino, he did not frequent the reunions at the apothecary's, he knew nothing of politics, he did not visit the devout ladies of the town—in a word, every one declared that he was absolutely good for nothing.

He said mass daily, and then generally shut himself up in the "great house of the marquis," as it was called, where he was always poring over books and documents, now writing, now reading—things in which no one else in the town took any interest whatever.

As the people of Villafria were very liberal and

advanced in their ideas, many of them accused Father Enrique of being a hypocrite, a Carlist, and of belonging to the "new party," while the real adherents of the "new party," on their side, and the Carlists, of whom there were also some in Villafria, looked with contempt upon the priest whom they could make no use of, and who entered into no confidences, or rather who had no confidences into which to enter with them.

Fortunately, Father Enrique was so amiable that he was incapable of inspiring hatred, and so silent and modest that he did not arouse envy. In the end his townspeople forgot that he was in existence—a species of forgetfulness that is by no means rare.

Only when he was among his most intimate friends—a few choice spirits—and some others, who, if they were not his admirers, allowed themselves to be carried away by the admiration of those who were, was Father Enrique's tongue gently loosened, and entertaining narrations, sublime discourses, beautiful thoughts, and noble sentiments flowed from his eloquent lips and penetrated the hearts and minds of his few auditors, or rather of his few interlocutors, for the priest avoided as far as was possible monopolising the conversation, in which he preferred that all should take part.

His interlocutors were Doña Luz, Doña Manolita, the doctor, Pepe Güeto, occasionally the parish priest, and Don Acisclo always.

When there were other visitors at the house of Don Acisclo—where these reunions took place—this natural frankness of manner vanished, and the conversation, as if by enchantment and inevitably, descended to the Villafrian level.

This reserve—which had its origin in the peculiar genius of his character and his understanding—sprang not from haughtiness, but from shyness. With the simple and unsophisticated natives of those distant lands in which he had lived he had been able to express himself in so plain and persuasive a style that his unstudied words, holy and sincere, had engraved themselves upon their hearts, carrying conviction to their souls. With persons of learning and culture or with those, who, on account of their benevolence, their enthusiasm, their deep poetic feeling, or the elevation of their views or their sentiments, inspired him with confidence or sympathy, his eloquence carried him naturally and insensibly into the highest regions; but with certain persons of mediocre intelligence with pretensions to culture, Father Enrique instinctively grew reserved, feeling his lack of power to influence them, and he was neither simple nor elevated, he neither moved the feelings by artless descriptions of the emotions nor carried with him the minds of his hearers in his own eagle flights into higher regions.

Villafria, a town of very advanced ideas, produced this effect on Father Enrique. Nothing could daunt his heart, nor was there here any

reason for such feeling, but his understanding was daunted and recognised its lack of power.

I do not affirm the existence of magnetic influence, but without using the word literally, I may use it in a figurative sense; between his fellow-townsmen and himself there was no magnetic current whatever. The magnetic current existed only between the priest and the few persons we have already mentioned, and who during the winter of 1860-61 gathered every night, with scarcely a single exception, around Don Acisclo's hearth, in the *master's kitchen*, which we have already described.

In these reunions the conversation never flagged. No one talked more incessantly than Doña Manolita, whose amusing nonsense made even Father Enrique laugh, notwithstanding his gravity. Sometimes, however, without intending it, without any desire to start a discussion on matters of a profounder nature, the discussion was started, and then Don Acisclo, Don Miguel, Pepe Güeto, and even Doña Manolita relapsed into silence to listen to Father Enrique, Doña Luz, and Dr. Anselmo. „

In these reunions absolute liberty of speech prevailed, and the doctor—who was the invariable opponent of Father Enrique—expressed himself with the utmost freedom, but as courtesy, even where it has not been bestowed by education, is a characteristic of every generous soul, Don Anselmo never forgot, even in his most violent attacks

to soften his rudeness by clothing it in polished phrase.

Under this polished form, however, was evident the radical negation of all knowledge which does not come by experience. Through faith we may believe in the supernatural; the imagination may create a superior world of abstract and religious ideas, but Reason can accept only that which she herself—in virtue of her own laws—deduces from the study and observation of the phenomena which she perceives by the senses. This alone is knowledge; all else is poetry or whatever else you may choose to call it. And the first principle of knowledge, in Don Anselmo's opinion, was that there is an infinite substance which, by virtue of the unexplainable agitation and volition that constitute its essence, produces a variety of beings whose relative perfection at the present epoch, and as far back in the past as the mind of man can penetrate, and as far forward in the future as his prescience can foresee, is constantly becoming greater, owing to a certain upward process and evolution apparently without end. How this began and how it will terminate, Don Anselmo maintained, we do not know, nor can we ever know. It was idle, in his opinion, to seek to penetrate beyond this, to discover whether before this evolution there was another evolution, whether after it all will return to repose and death; and whether at some future time a new desire and volition of atoms will take place

causing them to group themselves together and to create another universe and new lives and progress and conscience and what is called spirit, to end in death again. With respect to all this the mind could form only theories and dreams, launching itself in its daring speculations beyond the limits and confines of reason.

And what Don Anselmo affirmed of universal being, he affirmed also of the life of the individual. During the whole of his life, until its termination, was to be observed the gradual development of the individual. But Don Anselmo sustained that of the state of being before birth and after death nothing could be known with certainty; here were two shadowy gulfs, two unfathomable abysses, between which life manifested itself. And these gulfs, these abysses, were overlaid, as it were, by substance, by matter, by that which is perceived by our senses, which we cannot conceive except as possessing properties and forms; which we can conceive as changing its properties and forms, but which, in its essence, the human mind cannot conceive as capable of being destroyed. The only metaphysical certainty of this enemy of metaphysics was the eternity of this vague and undefined substance. This was the only immutable substance. Everything else—that is to say, its appearances and transformations, for outside this there is nothing—was perpetual change and ceaseless fluctuation. It is evident that from such a system could result neither morality, nor

duty, nor responsibility, nor free will ; but Don Anselmo, who was a very worthy man at heart, scarcely dared to acknowledge so diabolical a conclusion to himself, and still less to others, and he linked together a chain of subtleties to prove that we are free agents, that we should seek after righteousness, and that there is a fixed principle in which goodness consists. From this it resulted that if, with regard to the first-mentioned questions, he held his own bravely against Father Enrique, on the latter practical points he was always defeated and got himself inextricably entangled in his arguments, to the delight of everybody, and more than any one else, of his daughter Manolita, who one day concluded the expression of her satisfaction at his defeat by saying :

“Forgive my unfilial disrespect, papa, but you do not know what you are angling for when you enter into these discussions with Father Enrique.”

It is true, indeed, that Doña Manolita gave her father a couple of affectionate kisses to sweeten this wound to his vanity.

There were occasions on which Don Anselmo suffered still greater humiliation and mortification. Father Enrique, at such times, was himself obliged to take the doctor's part, saying that the subject was a difficult one, and that whoever studied it earnestly and inspired by a love for the truth, even though he might be mistaken in his conclusions, deserved not censure but praise ; that

those who keep out of the water because they cannot swim should not laugh at those who, in learning to swim, risk drowning themselves; that only he who seeks to follow new paths can go astray; and that only he who has the ardour and the daring to aspire can fall from a dangerous height.

In this way Doña Luz found a powerful ally in her perpetual disputes with the doctor, whose inveterate positivism never yielded nor held out a hope of his conversion, but whose high opinion of the knowledge, the exalted intelligence, and the goodness of the priest increased every day.

If these were the feelings of an opponent and an unbeliever, what were the feelings of the believers, of those who entertained the same convictions, of those on whose side Father Enrique so boldly and chivalrously did battle? Veneration, enthusiasm, admiration for the priest increased every day in their hearts, and more than in any other in the enthusiastic, lonely, and isolated heart of Doña Luz.

She thought him a model of holiness, a pattern of all the virtues, and an inexhaustible fount of learning. When Father Enrique spoke, she hung upon his words, concentrating all her mind upon his discourse lest she should lose a single syllable of it, and striving to grasp its deepest meaning. The desire for knowledge awoke within her more ardently than ever before when she compared herself with the priest and perceived how little she

knew ; and although Father Enrique never made any display of his learning, she led him on to speak, putting to him a thousand questions which he was obliged to answer, however much his modesty might rebel.

Vegetable life, the movements of the stars, the system of the world, the history of races, of their emigrations, their languages, beliefs, and laws, all these were the subjects of the questions of Doña Luz, and to all these Father Enrique found himself required to give an answer.

Sometimes Doña Luz would go out walking with Pepe Güeto and Doña Manolita, whose honeymoon was prolonged far beyond the usual time, and while the newly married pair followed or preceded them, laughing or chatting and whispering incessantly together, Father Enrique, who made one of the party, sustained a serious conversation with Doña Luz, which she found delightful, instructive, and elevating.

The physicians had declared that Father Enrique's life would be the sacrifice if he were to return to the Philippines before his health should be completely re-established. His stay in Villafria, consequently, was to extend over a period of two or three years.

His health had improved greatly, but he was still far from strong. He was a man of forty, but his delicate and somewhat childlike features made him appear younger. His complexion, which had been originally fair, was bronzed by the sun ; his

hair and eyes were black ; his forehead was smooth and broad. He was of slender build and of medium height. His life as a pilgrim and a missionary compelling him to conquer the debility of his constitution by the energy of his spirit, had lent his body extraordinary suppleness and agility.

Women are strange creatures, and Doña Luz was stranger than most women. There is nothing so greatly calculated to arouse curiosity as a persistent determination on the part of its possessor to conceal some suspected gift or accomplishment, and as Father Enrique, not through affectation, but either considering it unbecoming his sacred calling or because he disliked to make a display of anything whatsoever, had never exhibited his skill as a horseman before Doña Luz, the latter, having learned that he knew how to ride and had travelled a great deal on horseback in Cochin China and in India, innocently formed the project, which she at last succeeded in carrying out, of inducing him to take a ride on horseback with her and Don Anselmo. Doña Luz contrived matters so that Father Enrique should be obliged to put his horse into a gallop, which he did with perfect skill, showing no desire to excite her admiration or to display an accomplishment, but simply as a matter of course. Doña Luz, who rode daringly, barely escaped a dangerous fall in leaping a ditch. Her horse, misjudging the distance, had jumped short and would have fallen with his mistress had not Father Enrique, taking in the situation at a glance, come quickly to her assistance and urged the animal

over the ditch with the whip, and, by example, making his own horse first take the leap.

Father Enrique, after they had cleared the ditch, reproved Doña Luz for her daring with as much gentleness and courtesy as firmness, and, saying that it might furnish motive for scandal if he were to be seen galloping and leaping ditches in that fashion, declared that he would never again ride out on horseback, a resolution to which he thenceforward firmly adhered.

This very strength of will delighted Doña Luz, even when it interfered with the gratification of her tastes or caprices. The calmness and serenity of spirit of the priest, and still more his perspicacity, aroused her admiration. She thought him a magician in matters of the heart. All her little defects, all her faults, Doña Luz was conscious were noted by Father Enrique, who reproved her for them with delicate circumspection, while at the same time he did not fail to observe also all that there was of good and noble in her soul, praising these qualities in her without manifesting the remotest desire to make himself in this way agreeable to her.

She, too, looked into the soul of Father Enrique, and tried to read it as he had read hers. And she saw that it was clear and transparent as the sea that bathes the coasts of Andalusia, but so profound that, notwithstanding its transparence, notwithstanding the heavenly radiance with which it was flooded, the sight grew giddy and blind while it was yet at an immeasurable distance from the depths which it vainly strove to penetrate.

IX

HOMILY

IN the midst of this peaceful existence of Doña Luz and her friends the spring of 1861 arrived.

During Lent Father Enrique preached several times with only moderate success, and without eclipsing in any way the fame of the priests who preached alternately with him. The number of his admirers had been increased by scarcely any one who was not included in the circle of Don Acisclo's intimate friends.

This year Don Acisclo, owing to his nephew's presence in the town, desired to make a greater display than he had ever done before on Holy Thursday, and the somewhat profane banquet given in honour of the carrying in procession of the "Holy Supper" was sumptuous and abundant.

Doña Luz on this occasion was exceedingly amiable with every one, and Doña Manolita was very gay and witty.

These were not the reunions, however, which pleased Doña Luz and her friend, but the daily familiar ones in which they themselves incited

Don Anselmo to provoke a discussion with the priest so as to draw out the latter on points of religion and philosophy.

On not a few occasions Father Enrique had displayed, in the opinion of his hearers, a moving eloquence, but never had this eloquence produced so deep an impression on their minds as it did on the night of Easter Sunday.

Don Anselmo, incited by Doña Luz and his daughter, at last, after a few less important attacks, spoke as follows :

“There is a great deal said about charity and devotion, but if we examine the question closely we shall find that all our actions spring from selfishness. It is not piety, it is not love for our fellow-beings that moves us, but the desire for our own salvation and the fear of hell.”

“Viewed in this way,” answered Father Enrique, “there is no feeling, however disinterested it may be, which has not its foundation in selfishness. The words themselves express this. What is compassion ? It is nothing more than a certain quality by virtue of which the soul suffers when it sees others suffering, as if it suffered itself. Every sacrifice, consequently, whether of peace, of the life of the body, or of the goods of fortune, which tends to render the soul compassionate is to be regarded as springing from selfishness. The compassionate soul makes this sacrifice in order to free itself from suffering, so that the suffering of another may not pain it as if it were its own suffering, to

procure for itself the peace and the welfare it longs for. Every philanthropic act springs from pity ; consequently it springs from self-love ; consequently it springs from selfishness. The most you philanthropists can say in your defence is that your selfishness is a wise selfishness, a selfishness which is advantageous to all concerned."

"You see," said Don Anselmo, addressing his other auditors, "how Father Enrique, since he can not defend himself, attacks ; but his arguments do not apply to me. I am willing to grant him that the human virtue of philanthropy springs from pity, and, as a consequence, is selfish in its nature, but is the divine virtue of charity less selfish in its origin and source ? In order to avoid suffering myself in seeing another suffer, I perform, for instance, an act of philanthropy ; I perform it that I may be at peace with myself ; I am then selfish, but he who performs an act of charity for the love of God, to obtain favour with God, upon whom all his happiness depends, does he show himself less self-interested ? I even think that the philanthropist is superior to the man who is actuated by charity, for after all the natural state of the unbelieving soul which feels the sufferings of another as if they were its own, and performs a good work with the purpose of delivering itself from those sufferings, is nobler and more beautiful than the somewhat supernatural state of the believing soul which performs a good work through fear of punishment or with the hope of a reward ; not for

the love of the miserable being it succours and protects, but for love of the all-powerful being on whom all its hopes depend."

"To censure the soul for always seeking its own good," replied Father Enrique, "would be as absurd as to censure the atoms for seeking their centre of gravity. This is an immutable law, from which there is no exemption, which there is neither merit nor demerit in obeying. The soul seeks a state of beatitude, in which alone it can find repose, as the stone loosened from the summit of the tower falls without stopping in its course until it has reached the ground; as the ball shot by an unerring hand flies to bury itself in the centre of the target. The important, the free, the meritorious part of the action consists in choosing the right end, in seeking supreme good where in reality it resides. Once the good, real or fancied, is discovered, there is no one who does not seek to attain it by an act as free as it is necessary, since the very essence of every will is to desire the good. Love of self is a necessity—a necessity from which not even God himself is exempt."

"I do not deny that it may be so," replied Don Anselmo. "I agree with all you have said, Father Enrique, but where, then, is free will, the responsibility for our acts? There would in that case be neither sins nor crimes; there would only be errors. The intelligence would be deceived by appearances and would present to the will as good what is in reality bad."

"That would be the case," responded Father Enrique, "if error were unavoidable ; but error is not always unavoidable. In falling into error there may be freedom of will and, as a consequence, sin. At times the passions which we do not seek to control darken the intelligence and cause it to err ; at times the supernatural gift of grace does not come to us because we render ourselves unworthy of it, and in that case, also, the understanding is confused and led into error. But it seems to me that we are not now discussing free will and fate, but the question as to whether the soul in loving is disinterested, since, in doing so, it seeks its own good, although this good is centred in love itself."

"You are quite right," said Doña Luz.

That is the question under discussion to-day," added Doña Manolita.

"Let us take, for instance," continued Father Enrique, "a lover, a knight of the Middle Ages, who, in honour of his mistress, endures the most cruel hardships, exposes himself to the greatest dangers, and brings to a successful termination the most perilous adventures. Let us suppose that he does all this for a mistress who, he has reason to believe, will never requite his affection. And let us suppose, finally, that he does all this only to serve her, and without the hope of reward. We may still, according to Don Anselmo's method of reasoning, call this a selfish affection, since the soul of the aforesaid knight finds delight in doing

all he does for his mistress, although she scorns his love, or since, if he does not find delight in it, he finds consolation, considering that he would have been a thousand times more unhappy if he had not done what he has done, and given her such strong and unselfish proofs of his love. But is there anything strange in this, if this love, unrequited though it be, is the cause of happiness and a secret joy to the lover who prefers to love, although in vain, to seeing love depart from his soul, leaving it lonely, arid, and empty? It is thus demonstrated that all our acts spring from selfishness, although we must concede that there is a certain kind of selfishness which is worthy of admiration and praise."

"I accept," returned Don Anselmo, "the example of the lady and the knight-errant of the good old days of chivalry which Father Enrique adduces ; but I doubt much that the knight would perform his deeds of prowess in the hope of a reward which he knew to be unattainable. The same high esteem in which he holds the lady of his thoughts will persuade him that she will not prove unkind. The knight, consequently, seeks to perform these prodigies of valour selfishly and in the hope of a reward ; but even in the unlikely supposition that he should not cherish this hope, a comparison cannot be drawn between him and the charitable Christian, whose hopes, we are to suppose, never fail him. In his conception of God is involved the idea of his goodness, of his omnipo-

tence, and of his justice, and in them rests the security of his expected reward. I return, then, to the subject of my argument. Every worldly virtue may be selfish, but the charity of the Christian is even more selfish still, since it is based on the firm conviction and the sure and certain hope of reward. But, notwithstanding this, I do not regard this virtue as to be scorned, and I should deem the hope and the faith from which it springs supremely beneficent if it were always, although from interested motives, the cause of good works ; but charity, when it oversteps its just limits, seeks to attain its end, not by serving but by neglecting, scorning, and despising humanity and every other object the visible universe contains. The soul which retires within itself, which plunges into the fathomless abyss of its own essence, where it unites itself, or thinks it unites itself, with God, wherein does it serve men ? What love does it dedicate to them ? What earthly being is there for whom it interests itself ? The soul that thus buries itself in devout contemplation, fortified in its supreme seclusion, despises everything but the sphere wherein it dwells, identified with the Eternal Lover whom it adores and from whom it receives complete beatitude."

With insinuating gentleness and due composure, so as to make himself clearly understood by his hearers, and laying before them his ideas with order and perspicuity, Father Enrique proceeded

to reply to these arguments of Don Anselmo ; but, notwithstanding the control he habitually maintained over his feelings and his words, the emotion which agitated his spirit betrayed itself in his voice, in the brightness of his eyes, and the heightened colour of his cheeks, ordinarily pale. All this contributed to infuse into his arguments that singular persuasiveness that captivates the heart and brings under its gentle sway the proudest and most rebellious mind.

How reproduce faithfully and without weakening its force or diminishing its pious fervour the simple and inspired discourse which Father Enrique then pronounced ?

The discourse here reproduced by the profane, cold, sceptical, and unworthy narrator of this history is to be regarded at most as a vague sketch of what that enthusiastic believer said. Father Enrique spoke as follows :

“ In order to answer fitly the arguments of Don Anselmo it would be necessary to enter deeply into the profoundest principles of a very profound science. What I now say, consequently, cannot be other than ill arranged and obscure. I am going to sum up hastily and in few words what, in order to be made clearly intelligible, would require the strictest method and the utmost deliberation. Let us suppose, for an instant, that the soul, withdrawing itself from the contemplation of earthly things, all its faculties and feelings in suspension, enjoys God in ecstatic silence and

blissful tranquillity while still in the body, and, absorbed and plunged, as it were, in the contemplation of its Creator, takes no thought of its fellow-beings nor of other creatures. But before it attains this happiness, before ascending to so great a height, what proofs of goodness will the soul not have given? By what thorny paths will it not have had to climb, ever active, attentive, and persistent? To gain the favour of its Creator it will have performed deeds of mercy, consoling and protecting the unhappy and the forsaken, and, by its prayers and penitence, humility and meekness, it will have served as an astounding example and a profitable stimulus to every human being. The love of God is not to be attained by any other means. There is no easier or smoother path by which to reach him. It is plain, then, that although the soul, when it has reached this goal, is of no profit to other souls, before it has reached it it is exceedingly profitable. And notwithstanding, when the soul does reach it, when it plunges into its centre wherein God dwells, and there learns to know Him and unites itself to Him, how suppose that for this reason it is annihilated or becomes unprofitable? Perhaps in plunging into that abyss of light it perceives only darkness; perhaps the eyes of the soul are unable to support so much splendour; perhaps a limited intelligence is unable to comprehend those infinite and ineffable perfections. But if the intelligence, in the soul which reaches God, is unable to perceive and comprehend

its whole being, it is sufficient that it should perceive some one of its attributes in order that it should not be lost and annihilated in its bliss. It is enough that it should see God in order to perceive in God the world and the creatures that people it and beautify it, and to see all things in a more perfect and comprehensive manner than when it perceived them only through the medium of the fugitive impressions made upon the senses. The soul then perceives things as they are and not as they appear; it perceives them, not in their transitory manifestations, but in their pure and eternal idea—no longer in continual conflict, disconnected, discordant, engaged in a war of extermination, but united in the bonds of love, ascending in harmonious concord toward knowledge and righteousness, and progressing; drawn by a gentle and divine attraction, to the providential justification of all things. And as the soul loves God, and all things are in God, the soul loves all things in loving Him. And it loves all things not as before, through self-interest, but disinterestedly, for what more does the soul which possesses God aspire after or desire? Thus the soul loves all creatures as God loves them, and desires that they should all turn to God and love Him, and that the treasure of divine love should be shared by them all; and then the love of the soul conforming to and identified with the will of God embraces the universe and all the spiritual and physical beauty it contains; and far from remaining inert and

empty, as it were, and unconscious of its own existence, the soul, in uniting itself with God, attains to a clearer and distincter self-consciousness and burns with a more ardent love than any earthly love ; and there is no excellence in created beings whose value it does not justly estimate and appreciate, no beauty in which without concupiscence it does not delight, for it now revels in and satiates itself with the purest joys ; nor riches which it does not view without covetousness, for it is the recipient and heir, as it were, of the most precious gifts ; and rejoices without jealousy in the love bestowed by God upon His creatures, because it comprehends them, and imagines that all the love bestowed upon them by God it receives and enjoys itself. What sacrifice, what stupendous work of charity, what heroic act of love, what devotion, abnegation, martyrdom, will not the soul be capable of which unites itself with God and which turns toward all creatures and contemplates them in God Himself as if they were a part of the being and the substance of the beloved object ! Far from believing, then, that this union of the soul with God renders it inert and unprofitable with respect to other beings, I believe that it qualifies it and incites it to draw from the exhaustless spring of divine love the streams of charity which it afterward diffuses on the earth ; for as the Word, which is God, gave its mortal and human life for the welfare of mankind, the soul which unites itself with God acquires the divine grace to

dare and suffer for mankind tortures and death, imitating Christ, who is the God with whom it unites itself."

In this manner Father Enrique expressed himself, as far as the unskilful and profane pen of the writer is competent to report his improvised homily; albeit in the sacred science which he thus expounded the subtlest conceptions are uttered, the deepest mysteries elucidated by those who have acquired their knowledge not from books and study, but from personal experience, and who by reason of their exalted sanctity enjoyed the divine favour.

And while Father Enrique discoursed, Don Acisclo listened entranced, although he did not comprehend the meaning of a single word; Don Anselmo, without being convinced by the arguments of the priest, listened to them with the same pleasure with which he would have listened to a beautiful poem; and Doña Luz, Doña Manolita, and Pepe Güeto listened with profound attention and extreme religious fervour, flattering themselves that they understood it all.

Perhaps Father Enrique, however, was not of this opinion, for in order to elucidate and complete his meaning, he resumed as follows:

"I may compare your worldly philanthropy to a broad river which, by means of canals and trenches, waters and fertilises the fields, while the soul that unites itself by love with God is like the lake which under the influence of the sun's rays sends up its vapours to the heavens. Are the

waters of this lake less beneficial than the waters of the river? No ; for presently they descend in fertilising showers more profitable than any artificial irrigation, and which are even the immediate cause of this artificial irrigation, since the rain which falls from heaven congeals in stainless and abundant snows upon the mountain peaks, forming the inexhaustible sources whence flow the crystal waters of brooks and rivers. Let the rude and ignorant husbandman continue to believe when he irrigates his fields that the water he uses comes from the neighbouring mountain and that it is derived by hidden channels from the bosom of the earth. But would this water be there if it had not fallen from the heavens? In the same way, philanthropy, a merely human virtue, has its origin—those who practise it, perhaps, being themselves ignorant that it is so—in divine charity. The love of God ascends to heaven ; it might be supposed that it disdained this lower world, but, descending again to the earth, like the limpid dew of morning, it becomes transformed into a fervid love to man. In our true religion the supreme good does not imply, as in some of the false religions, the annihilation of consciousness. If the mind cannot be reached by reason, God adorns and clothes it with supernatural graces ; instead of destroying it he endows it with faith, that it may live and understand. And at times an interior light springs from the depths of the soul, illuming the faculties that have

not penetrated to these depths, where our individual being, still in ecstasy, is not darkened, does not grow giddy or faint, but, on the contrary, lives with a more fervent life, feels, thinks, knows, and loves. If, in order to ascend to the mystic union, the soul frees itself from all material bonds, if it arrives at a comprehension of the fact that God only and itself exist, this death resembles natural death, in which the soul frees itself from its mortal trammels. And as the soul is to clothe itself with a glorious body, so too will all its faculties, which, perhaps, in order to reach divine ecstasy had died, live again. No; the soul of the devout Christian is not lost in universal being, as in the Nirvana of the Buddhists. No; it does not fall into an eternal sleep, but, on the contrary, attains the fulness of life. The atmosphere penetrated everywhere by the rays of the sun seems golden sunlight and not air; and the iron heated at the forge is not opaque and dark, but refulgent as the fire into which it has been plunged, and in the same way, in so far as it is possible to compare it with material things, the soul which has united itself with God seems one with God. And finally, for the profit which other men may derive from these gifts and graces of contemplative spirits, I wish to add a consideration of great weight, to wit, that no belief, no religion exalts the dignity of human nature, of the human being considered apart from accidental advantages, as does ours. The Elysian Fields, the paradises, the empyreans

of other religions open their gates only to the great ones of the earth—to princes, *savants*, warriors, and nobles—while our heaven is a heaven for the poor, for the lowly, for the peaceable and the meek. And this serves, not only as a consolation, by the hope it holds out of a better life for the frowns of fortune and the hardships and misery they must endure in this life, but it exercises a powerful influence on the present period of existence, and confers an inestimable value upon every human soul, as being redeemed by Christ, and renders all men more truly equal than any law of man could do, and clothes with sacred majesty and makes all creatures—the most wretched, the vilest, the most abject, and the most sinful—more to us than brothers.”

Father Enrique’s hearers, who on this evening were only four in number, listened to him with delight. Don Anselmo went so far as to confess that he began to feel a desire to become a Christian ; Doña Manolita and her husband felt themselves better Christians than ever before ; Don Acisclo thought that his nephew had almost as good an understanding as himself, although he employed it in less practical matters ; and Doña Luz, charmed, enraptured, added, perhaps, with her rich poetic imagination a thousandfold to the beauty, the originality, and the profundity of Father Enrique’s discourse, of which she did not lose a single word, grasping in its profoundest significance each and every part of it.

X

AN ILLUSTRIOUS CANDIDATE

IN this way the pleasure Doña Luz derived from Father Enrique's society and the sincere friendship she entertained for him was strengthened day by day.

As if by a rapid, though gentle descent, her heart had come to desire exclusively these conversations with a man in whom she found genius, wisdom, and elevation of thought and feeling hitherto undiscovered by her in any other human being, and of which she had knowledge only from the books she had read.

No mistrust disturbed the purity or shook the constancy of this feeling, tranquil and serene, irresistible and frank. Doña Luz, proud as she was in the crystal mirror of her untroubled conscience, could descry no danger which, however faintly or remotely it might present itself to her view, would still be a stain. The slightest thought of putting herself on her guard would have implied fear and unworthy suspicion. As

Doña Luz had no fear for herself, neither had she any fear for Father Enrique. She regarded him as a saint, and she began to love and venerate him as pious persons love and venerate the saints.

The candour of Doña Luz was so great that she would have communicated to Father Enrique the sentiments with which he inspired her if she had not feared to offend his modesty or to seem a flatterer. But although she did not tell him so in words, the extraordinary predilection she manifested for his society, seeking it continually, and happy only when he was at her side, when she was speaking to him or listening to him, was sufficient evidence of their nature.

Father Enrique, on his part, did not manifest the slightest surprise at the marks of good-will he received from Doña Luz. And this, not from vanity or because he thought they were his due, but because he thought nothing could be more natural than that she should thus reciprocate his friendship for her.

Father Enrique had a great deal or very little knowledge of the world, according to the meaning we choose to attach to those words.

He knew the human heart as it is by nature and in its unsophisticated state. In dealing with the simple natives of the far East, gaining souls and subduing evil inclinations, he had shown marvellous power, but as he had left Spain when very young; and had scarcely any experience of the

artificial and somewhat insincere society of our age, whose culture and conventional usages extend to the remotest hamlet, he regarded and judged everything with a certain primitive simplicity, interpreting words and actions differently from people in general. So that, although he noted, and felt flattered in doing so, that Doña Luz held him in the highest esteem, he never suspected that there could be the slightest impropriety in this, either on her account or his own, or because of the public. The affection of Doña Luz differed in his eyes from the affection entertained for him by the various Indian, Chinese, or Anamite converts he had made, only in that the feeling of Doña Luz was to be esteemed of higher value on account of the excellence of the person professing it, and in whom the priest had discovered innumerable perfections—a mind carefully cultivated and capable of soaring to the highest regions of thought and a heart full of tender, noble and pure emotions. Nor, as I have said, had Father Enrique any fear on his own account. He loved Doña Luz as the master loves his pupil, as one soul loves another soul when both share the same beliefs and opinions, when both soar to the same heights and cherish and meditate upon the same thoughts.

Father Enrique felt himself attracted toward Doña Luz more powerfully than toward any of the other persons whom he knew in the town or whom, outside of the town, he had ever before

known ; but this may be explained in the simplest and most innocent way.

Who better than Doña Luz grasped the meaning of his discourses ? Who followed his 'arguments most closely, who anticipated him at times in those flights of the imagination when he struggled to rise to regions to which cold reason cannot attain ? Unquestionably, Doña Luz. Doña Luz was, consequently, for Father Enrique, a being far superior to all who surrounded her, and worthy of devoted affection. In the turbid water of a neglected pond, in the disturbed and muddy water of a torrent, nothing is reflected clearly, while in the limpid, smooth, and tranquil bosom of a clear lake, the sky, the hills, the stars, the light, the flowers, and all the glory and pomp of nature are imaged with so much perfection that the sky seems there to be more spacious and profound, the light clearer, the flowers brighter, the hills bolder, their outlines and contours to be more graceful, and to recede more softly into the distance, the grass of the meadow greener and fresher. Wherefore, even he who does not observe the beauty of the lake itself, who is cold to the charm it exercises, may still take delight in what it reflects and duplicates in its bosom, and take more pleasure in contemplating all this in its reflection in the lake than as it is in reality. And, in like manner, Father Enrique, who scarcely noticed the beauty and refinement of the form and face of Doña Luz, or the distinction of her

manners, or the repose and dignity of her bearing, looked beyond her bodily and exterior graces into her soul, where shone a world of thoughts which were his own, but which seemed a thousand times more beautiful reflected back from the mind of Doña Luz than they were in themselves.

The conversations between Doña Luz and Father Enrique almost always took place in their familiar reunions ; in the presence of Don Acisclo, Don Anselmo, Pepe Güeto and his wife, and Don Miguel, the parish priest. Sometimes, however, they would chance to find themselves alone in the house, or they would converse without listeners or other interlocutors when they went out walking with Pepe Güeto and his wife, and these latter preceded or followed them, absorbed in their own happiness, for their honeymoon, undimmed as yet by a cloud, still lasted. On these occasions, not from premeditation on the part of either or studied purpose, which would imply a fear from which both were free, but through an instinctive, innocent and holy delicacy, through unconscious shyness and saintly purity of heart, they never spoke of themselves nor of their secret feelings even in general terms, but of the visible pomp of the material universe, and of the harmony, richness, and order which adorn it, proclaiming the goodness, the power, and the wisdom of him who created it out of nothing.

Doña Luz, however, had occasionally led Father Enrique, when others were present, to speak of him-

self and of his travels. And Father Enrique, with modesty and sobriety, it is true, could not but let the dangers which he had run and the sufferings and hardships he had endured with heroic valour be perceived and appreciated.

Father Enrique, on his side, had read in the eyes and on the countenance of Doña Luz her most secret thoughts and feelings. In this he had been aided by the habit of observing and studying human nature, which he had acquired during the many years in which he had been a preacher, confessor, and catechist. Besides, if there had been anything which he was unable to decipher, his uncle, Don Acisclo, in his rough speech, would have given him the key to it, describing to him, as he had done, the life of Doña Luz ever since she had been in the town, the indifference which she had manifested toward her admirers, her pride, and her firm resolution never to marry.

However closely we may examine into and study our own natures, however deeply we may search into the inmost recesses of our conscience, however severely we may judge ourselves, and however vigilant we may be, we are apt to cherish some favourite plan or project which delights and attracts us, and which shrouds itself in so fascinating a mystery that it succeeds in hiding or veiling or disguising itself from the reason when called to its tribunal to be judged, and perhaps condemned, while it remains exposed and bare, as it were, to the eager gaze of the passion that has created it.

In this vague and confused manner Father Enrique, who found delight in the companionship of Doña Luz, formed, if not a project, an illusion, a hope, a vision of future friendship, merely, but of friendship full of tenderness. He was scarcely conscious that he formed it, but he assuredly formed it. This dream, on the other hand, was so far removed from anything bordering on sinfulness of feeling that it gave rise to no scruples of conscience. His project was simple. Doña Luz, it was almost certain, would never marry now ; the best part of her intelligence, therefore, would be employed in communicating with the intelligence of the priest, her voice in speaking to him, her ear in listening to him ; her most serious occupation would be to think of heavenly things according to the method and form in which he thought ; her greatest delight to speak with him of God and of the soul, and of all truth, and of all goodness and beauty. In fine, Father Enrique, without confessing it to himself, came gradually to persuade himself that with his spirit he would complete and interpenetrate the spirit of Doña Luz, and he hardly noticed that she had dominated his spirit completely, although with a certain subordination and dependence of other sentiments and ideas of far superior worth, which prevailed above that new and more potent influence.

From all this resulted an ardent friendship which was nourished by the intercourse and constant communication between these two persons.

In small towns, neither more nor less than in larger places, the tongue of slander is never idle, but on this occasion, many circumstances conspired to prevent gossip from busying itself with relations so innocent, and placing an evil construction upon them.

The chief causes which concur to make an intimacy between two persons of opposite sexes the subject of gossip, particularly if this intimacy has not marriage as its professed end, did not present themselves here. As a general thing, one of these causes is the desire of the man to have it thought, through vanity, that more is going on than appears, a suspicion to which he himself by a feigned reticence often artfully contributes. There are women, too, who are no less desirous that the attentions they receive should be known, especially if their adorers be men of rank or wealth, or otherwise distinguished.

Nothing of this kind was the case between Father Enrique and Doña Luz. The contrary, indeed, was the case.

The young men of Villafria and the neighbouring towns, who, warranted in doing so by their gifts of person or of fortune, had ventured to aspire to the hand of Doña Luz, and had been gently repulsed by her before compromising themselves by a declaration, had so high an opinion both of her and of themselves that they one and all regarded her, proof as she had been against their attractions and their endowments, as invul-

nerable. How was it possible to suppose that she who had been cold, indifferent, and insensible to the love of a handsome, bold, and gallant young man should be captivated by a middle-aged and sickly friar.

Women are, for the most part, eager to reveal what they may know or suspect to the discredit of other women whom they hate, but Doña Luz was so superior to, and so far removed from all rivalry, and had made herself so greatly beloved by every one, that no one cared to play the spy upon her movements, so as to be able to detect her in a fault for the purpose of accusing her of it afterward.

Besides, Doña Manolita, with her loquacity, her independence, and her jests, was the organ of public opinion of greatest authority and widest influence in Villafria, and Doña Manolita would never have consented to hear the actions of Doña Luz criticised, even had there been reason for such criticism, which there was not ; she would have silenced with her mockery the loudest accents of calumny.

Nor was the opinion entertained in Villafria of Father Enrique such as to admit of any evil construction being placed upon his intimacy with Doña Luz ; most of his fellow-townpeople, as they did not find him entertaining, and, indeed, scarcely knew what to make of him, had almost ceased to remember his existence, and if they sometimes called him to mind, it was to think of him as a holy man, tiresome, sickly, and by no

means agreeable in his manners. A man of a different epoch, odd and incomprehensible to them as he was, there would have been nothing strange in their suspecting him of conspiring for the re-establishment of the Inquisition, or even of eating the raw flesh of children ; but no one in the place could ever conceive the possibility of a man who was so pale, so emaciated, so melancholy, and so absorbed in his work, indulging in gallantry or being himself an object of admiration to the fair sex.

For all these reasons no one saw anything evil in or criticised the friendship of the familiar intercourse between Doña Luz and Father Enrique, who, indeed, met and conversed together, and allowed their innocent and unreserved admiration for each other to be observed only in the small circle, outside which nothing was carried, and inside which everything was explained in the simplest manner, or rather was not explained, since neither for Don Anselmo and his daughter and son-in-law, nor for Don Acisclo nor Don Miguel was the slightest explanation necessary. Don Miguel, the parish priest, especially, and Don Acisclo, each in his own way, beheld in Doña Luz and in Father Enrique two singular beings, whose discourse they listened to, for the most part, as if it were celestial music which they heard without comprehending. There was nothing, consequently, more just or more reasonable than that these two beings should communicate to each other thoughts and feelings which they only, after all, were able to understand.

Meanwhile, Doña Manolita, who was very observant and very shrewd, had noticed that a complete transformation was taking place in the mind of Don Acisclo. Doña Manolita had communicated the result of her observations to Doña Luz and to Pepe Güeto.

According to these observations, while Don Acisclo was every day more and more gratified and elated that his circle should have become so learned that it seemed an academy, at the same time he went about seemingly very much pre-occupied, often talking to himself as if a swarm of thoughts were agitating themselves in his brain, and like the bees in the hive, striving to make, instead of the mellifluous honeycomb, some stupendous resolution.

"What plan has he in his mind?" Doña Manolita asked herself. "What if the finger of the Almighty should have touched his heart? What if the good man, edified by the homilies of his nephew, should intend to embrace, himself, a life of contemplation, and to be also a saint?"

Pepe Güeto and Doña Luz laughed at so unlikely a supposition, but the truth was that they, too, had observed the thoughtfulness of Don Acisclo, and felt no little curiosity to know the subject of his meditations.

In Father Enrique's presence they did not dare to question Don Acisclo, but Father Enrique always left the company at ten, for he never supped, while Pepe Güeto and his wife remained to sup

every evening. The supper generally lasted till eleven, the family sitting a long time at table, while the servants supped in their turn, this being the hour of greatest gaiety and least restraint.

On several occasions, sitting in this way around the table after supper, when the maids had left the room, Doña Manolita had felt her way to see if she could draw from Don Acisclo the cause of his preoccupation.

Don Acisclo, while he denied that he was preoccupied, or that there was even cause for his being so, showed more and more plainly every day that such was the case.

One evening, then, Don Acisclo seemed to be more preoccupied, but also gayer than usual. Some secret joy was bubbling up in his breast, as it were, and seeking an outlet at his lips.

Doña Manolita saw this, and said :

"Come, Don Acisclo, don't be perverse. Don't torment yourself only for the pleasure of tormenting yourself. If you are dying to tell what is going on, why do you not tell it? You are making ready some surprise which is to astound us all. The business is well advanced. Tell us what it is, so that we may be prepared for it."

"Yes, Don Acisclo, tell us what it is," added Pepe Güeto. "My wife insists upon it that you are dying to be a saint like your nephew, and that the day least expected you will abandon us all and take yourself off to Sierra Morena, to do penance there, hiding yourself in some thicket or cave."

"That is the thing furthest from my thoughts," said Don Acisclo. "I have no vocation for holiness, and one can serve God in any state in life."

"There is not a doubt of that," said Doña Luz. "I never supposed you would take a notion to follow the example of hermits and penitents, but I, too, have thought, like my friends, that you have been meditating and preparing for some days past a change in your condition and your manner of life."

"These women are the very devil," said Don Acisclo. "One can hide nothing from them. They see into everything. I neither can nor will deny it any longer. I am going to be another being henceforth. I confess that my nephew's example has served me as a stimulus."

"Did I not say so?" exclaimed Doña Manolita. "Don Acisclo, are you going to leave us? Are you going to China or to India to convert the heathen?"

"Something of that there is," responded Don Acisclo. "I am going to convert the heathen, but for the present, without leaving Villafria."

"And how is that going to be?" said Doña Luz.

"Very simply," continued Don Acisclo. "You already know that I have been and am now, be it said among ourselves, casting vanity aside, a man useful to my country. I contribute to the advancement of agriculture. I add to the wealth of the country. I feed the poor who are willing to work. In short, I am a useful man."

"It is not necessary for you to praise yourself. Who does not acknowledge," said Pepe Güeto, "that you are the providence of Villafria?"

"Very well; all this I do with the money I have made myself. I have had, and I still have, the capacity to make money. But seeing that my nephew has acquired knowledge and fame, I comprehend that money is not enough, and that there are other things which are worth almost more than money. Knowledge, for instance. But how acquire it? The reed is now too hard to make pipes of. It is now too late for me to bury myself in books. There is something else, however, which attracts me, which seduces me, and which it is not yet too late for me to acquire."

"What may it be? What may it not be?" murmured Doña Manolita.

"Guess, child; give us a proof of your wit; show that you can see the grass grow."

"I confess that I am a fool; I cannot give a guess. Since you aspire to be neither a *savant* nor a saint, to what do you aspire?"

"I aspire to power. Power is the complement of money. I wish to be a politician, a man of influence, the master of this electoral district, defeating the leader of the capital of the district, who is at present all powerful here."

"What has put such notions into your head, Don Acisclo?" asked Doña Luz.

"My political convictions," responded Don Acisclo, with the utmost gravity.

"Your political convictions? You astound me. Why, whence do these convictions proceed? I supposed you had never given a thought to politics in the whole course of your life."

"Let us understand each other," replied Don Acisclo. "To the politics which serve as a pretext or cloak, it is true that I have never given a thought, but of true politics I think constantly."

"And what is true politics?"

"True politics is that all we who compose the Spanish nation give to the Government every year, in different ways, more than the half of what the soil, our labour, and our brains put together produce. Then the Government, now in the form of salaries, now in the form of subsidies, now in other forms, divides all this among its adherents. In this way, what the Government absorbs in contributions is diffused again like a beneficent rain. Is it not folly in me to pay my debts and not to demand what is due me? Is it not a piece of stupidity in me to contribute and not to distribute? Would it not be wiser in me to imitate Don Paco, the great elector of this district, who pays in the proportion of ten and receives in the proportion of eighty? What! Have I not nephews, sons, and *protégés* to whom to give sugar plums? Would not a cross suit me as if made to order? Would the title of Excellency be unbecoming to me? Instead of paying a great deal, as I do now, and receiving nothing, would it not suit me divinely to pay less and to receive back with usury all and

more than all I have paid ? That is what politics is, and that is why I wish to enter politics. Why do I say I wish to enter it ? I am already plunged up to my neck in politics."

Doña Luz was far from believing politics to be what Don Acisclo understood by the word ; but seeing how firmly persuaded he was that it was nothing else than this, and noting, too, that Pepe Güeto and his wife were not far from being of Don Acisclo's opinion, she did not wish to preach to deaf ears, nor try to convince her friends that the true conception of politics was very different from this. She was greatly shocked, too, by the tortuous course of reasoning by which the mind of Don Acisclo had arrived at the conclusion, based on the homilies, philosophico-Christian dissertations, and other the like lofty disquisitions of Father Enrique, that he himself ought to be a politician to the end that he might pay fewer contributions and receive much distribution.

Concerning this latter point Doña Luz could not help saying :

"Granting even—which is conceding a great deal—that politics is what you take it to be, it surprises me, Don Acisclo, that you should have founded your resolution to enter politics, defeat Don Paco, and yourself take his place on the dis-courses of your nephew."

"Look here, Señorita Doña Luz," responded Don Acisclo, "nothing can be plainer than the line of argument I have pursued. Enrique has

encouraged me without himself being aware of it. Through him I have learned that in our family there is material for everything. He is a saint and a *savant*—the man of theory. I am rich. Why should I not also be influential, that I may be the typical, practical man. Were there not in ancient times in a single family Mary and Martha? Why should we not be now in a single family, with the difference of sex, he Mary, I Martha—he the man of contemplation, I the man of action?"

"Good for Don Acisclo," said Pepe Güeto.

"And he has reason on his side," added Doña Manolita; "he knows where the shoe pinches."

"Just put your finger in my mouth and see whether I will bite it or not," exclaimed Don Acisclo. "What! Is a man with all my millions, and with so distinguished a nephew as mine, to be all his miserable life humiliated by that rascal of a Don Paco, to whom the representative gives all and more than all he asks for?"

"Nothing of the sort, Don Acisclo," said Pepe Güeto, allowing himself to be carried away by his enthusiasm. "It is necessary to shake off the yoke."

"Death to Don Paco, the tyrant!" cried Doña Manolita, laughing.

"It is to be understood that the death is merely political, and not civil or natural," interrupted Doña Luz.

"And how are you going to manage to kill him politically?" asked Pepe Güeto.

"How am I going to manage? How have I

managed ? is what you should ask. What ! Am I the man to let the grass grow under my feet ? I have it all arranged. The Minister counts upon me. The governor of the province counts upon me. I have proved to them that the representative we send from here is not a real representative but a counterfeit one, and as he is now in the Opposition the Government will defeat him with my help in the new elections, which are soon to take place."

"And who is the new candidate of the Government ?" asked Doña Manolita.

"An illustrious candidate, a man with a brilliant future before him, a hero of the African war," said Don Acisclo very pompously. "I have taken him under my protection. I will work miracles for him ; I will bring to our side the partisans of Don Paco, who will then be left unsupported, and my man will come in by an immense majority."

"And what is the name of your man ?" asked Pepe Güeto.

"His name is Don Jaime Pimentel y Moncada, brigadier of cavalry, a man as brave as the Cid, of noble lineage, young, and handsome. You shall see him presently, for he is soon coming to visit the district."

With this important piece of intelligence the conversation terminated, partly because it was now late, and partly because the noisy acclamations of Doña Manolita and of Pepe Güeto, prevented it proceeding further on this evening.

XI

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ELECTION

DON ACISCLO'S plan had been long meditated over in secret, and it was so well devised, arranged, and perfected that there was no little probability of its success.

The enterprise, however, was difficult, almost impossible, indeed, for any one who did not possess the activity, the authority, the influence, and the money possessed by Don Acisclo.

DON PACO, the chief elector, was a person of importance, and counted upon electing a model representative—a representative like whom it was not possible to suppose that a dozen others could be found in all Spain.

According to the most reliable statistics, the salaries, gratuities, and favours of various kinds, computed in currency, lavished by the representative upon his adherents in the district, all drawn from the national treasury, amounted to twenty times more than the sum paid into it by the district in the form of direct and indirect con-

tributions. Supposing for a single instant that all the other representatives were equally able, clever, fortunate, and generous with the representative in question, the Government would either have to renew the miracle of the loaves and fishes on an immense scale, or would have to show a deficit at the end of the year of nineteen times the amount of the entire resources and revenues of the State for the same period.

It is for this reason that there are so few representatives to be found in Spain like the one whom Don Acisclo proposed to himself to defeat. He was, *par excellence*, what is called a *natural* representative.

The representative, by unceasing vigilance and by the exercise of a marvellous art, acquires this *naturalness* in a district, distributing places lavishly, while, to obtain these places from the Government, he relies, in addition to his talents and his personal importance, on the loyalty which he affirms and proves that the electors bear him, and by virtue of which he is a *natural* representative, and enjoys his district by a twofold right.

Although the *natural* representative may be on the side of the Opposition, he still keeps his district for two reasons. The first reason is that when he is out of power the electors have the hope that he and his party will soon come into power again, and that they will then receive fresh favours. The second reason is that the *natural* representative, even when he is not in power, succeeds

in keeping many of his *protégés* in their employments, and often even has in his gift important places, whether because the privileges of *natural* representative qualify him for all this or because he has influential friends in the Ministry, or because the Ministers, his opponents, treat his wishes with consideration, expecting a reciprocity of favours when they shall be out of power.

The representative against whom Don Acisclo was going to rebel was at this moment out of power; but no one doubted but that he would soon come into power again. Many of his *protégés* had been dismissed, but many also still retained their employments and received their salaries. The reputation enjoyed by the representative for being friendly, obliging, and potent to obtain sugar plums was so firmly established that even his temporary loss of power augmented instead of diminishing the number of his adherents. The most astute and far-seeing of these saw how propitious was the occasion to secure favour with him by serving him while he was out of power, which would give a certain air of disinterestedness to such services, this course of procedure being what is there called in terse and elegant language, in harmony with the poetry of bucolic life, "To carry straws to the nest." "He who does not carry straws to the nest seldom gets a share of the prey," I have often heard the most sententious personage of that part of the country say.

This being the situation of affairs, Don Acisclo's purpose of defeating and supplanting Don Paco seems a rash and insane attempt, somewhat resembling the attempt of the serpent in the fable, to bite the file.

But one must not be discouraged by obstacles like these or even greater ones. Don Acisclo was not discouraged. He had confidence in his own energy, and was resolved to fight with Don Paco, whose tyranny had rendered him insufferable to him. What Don Acisclo had well considered, however, like a prudent leader, was the colossal and serious character of his enterprise, and in order to carry it to a favourable termination he had taken every necessary precaution, provided ways and means, sought allies, and collected forces and resources of every description.

When a representative, or the grand elector in his name, bestows an office, he is not always sure of the gratitude of the recipient, for the latter may fancy that he has well earned it, while, on the other hand, the envious, the grumblers, and the discontented seem to spring up out of the ground, so numerous are they—a thing difficult to be avoided; for no matter how many offices a representative may obtain, he cannot obtain one for each elector. Among the employés and the successful place-hunters grumbling and envy are not unusual. So-and-so complains that some one else has received a sweeter and richer sugar plum than his; another complains that the employment of

such a one is of great importance, while his is insignificant, from all which results no little bitterness. One who is only made keeper of a Government shop thinks he ought to be a custom-house officer ; and another, who has been made a mail carrier, and is always shut up in his waggon, sighs for the salt stores, which were given to a third, who disposed in the election of fewer votes than he ; and he who, as a loyal adherent, has obtained the salt stores, fancies himself slighted because he was not appointed a keeper of the magazine, for this and much more was his due. The post of *alcalde* is generally greatly disputed, and there are almost always two or three who are dissatisfied because it has not been given to them. In short, even if the representative and his *alter ego*, Don Paco, were as prudent and as wise as Ulysses, whom Minerva herself, descending *ad hoc* from Olympus, inspired with the strictest distributive justice to distribute portions of roasted ox at the banquets of the heroes of the "Iliad," or whether because to distribute sugar plums is a more arduous task than to distribute roast beef, or, finally, because the electors of Spain are by nature more discontented than were the demi-gods and Achaian warriors, the fact is that discontent spread until it extended to the very capital of the district.

All this discontent would have been of no consequence, and would have vanished like a summer cloud if Don Acisclo, with Machiavellian arts, had not fanned the flame of discord, feeding it with

ingenuously contrived misrepresentations, artfully insinuated, and raised at an opportune moment a standard of revolt, to which flocked those who thought themselves slighted or ill-requited for their efforts.

In this way Don Acisclo succeeded in forming a powerful electoral minority, whose centre and nucleus was Villafria.

He then entered into negotiations with the Government, and as soon as the Government had promised its support Don Acisclo, in order to defeat the representative of Don Paco and elect in his stead the before-mentioned Don Jaime Pimentel, strove to convert his minority into a majority, attracting to his side the neutral and the vacillating, and endeavouring especially to rouse from their apathy and draw into the contest certain of those who never vote or take any part in politics, perhaps because they have no desire for Government employments.

Among those who thus disdained to take any part in politics—worthy of reprobation, to my mind, because they leave the field free to unscrupulous politicians—there was in the district a man whom, if his apathy could once be overcome, an entire town would follow. This town was that which my readers already know by the name of Villabermeja. The electoral Cincinnatus whom Don Acisclo desired to move—because with him on his side he regarded his victory as beyond a doubt—was my distinguished friend Don Juan Fresco, from whose

lips I have heard this, as well as many other stories no less instructive, which I will relate in due course of time, if God grants me life and health.

Don Juan Fresco was on friendly terms with Don Acisclo, who had been of service to him on many occasions ; but Don Juan Fresco did not allow himself to be easily moved. Don Acisclo had ridden out to his place two or three times to see him. He had, besides, written to him four or five letters for the purpose of winning him over to his views, but without avail. He had not been able to succeed in making him break his resolution or depart from his fixed rule to take no part in elections or politics.

Don Acisclo was by turns furious, melancholy, and desperate on account of this obstinacy. With Don Juan Fresco on his side his enterprise was an easy one ; without Don Juan Fresco, notwithstanding the support of the Government, the victory was far from being assured.

Meantime, everything else being ready, and the elections near at hand, nothing remained but to make public the name of the candidate, until now carefully kept concealed by Don Acisclo and the Government ; but Don Acisclo, before doing this, wished to try for the last time his persuasive powers upon Don Juan, revealing to him in secret the name of the candidate, and lauding his good qualities and his merits. To this end he wrote him another letter, as eloquent as he knew how to make it. The answer of Don Juan reached him

on the following day, and its satisfactory nature—so different from what Don Acisclo had feared it would be—was the source of the good humour of which Doña Manolita had ventured to ask the cause, and of the ease and readiness with which he had unfolded his plans, as has been related, to Doña Luz, Pepe Güeto, and the doctor's daughter.

The letter of Don Juan Fresco is an important document, which I have now in my possession, and which it may not be out of place to reproduce here.

It is as follows :

"ESTEEMED SIR AND FRIEND.—Heretofore, notwithstanding our friendship, I have felt myself compelled to turn a deaf ear to your persuasions. And this because our views differ in many respects. We are both more broad-minded than Riego ; we are both more liberal than the author of the "Citador"—a work which you have doubtless read ; we are both advocates of progress of the most distinct and decided type ; and we are both lovers of equality—meaning by this equality before the law—which may exist apart from and independent of the inequalities created by nature, fortune, ability, or chance, whereby some are foolish and others wise, some rich and others poor. But, notwithstanding the perfect harmony in our sentiments, there are between you and me certain radical differences, arising from the fact that we have each formed to ourselves a very different ideal—meaning by *ideal*, a word now much in fashion, the aim of each one's aspirations. Your

ideal is that there should be a Government which will distribute among its adherents all there is to be distributed, which shall arrange everything, which shall interfere in everything, which shall teach us what we are to learn, point out to us what we are to worship, make our roads for us, carry our letters for us, take care of our temporal and eternal welfare, and which shall even destroy for us the locust and the phylloxera, exorcise storms, hail showers, epidemics, the epizooty, and drought, and ordain and provide for us timely rains and abundant harvests. A Government intrusted with such and so various charges will have need of a great deal of money, which it will afterward distribute among those who are to make us happy, bestowing upon us salvation, knowledge, riches, health, long life, water, means of locomotion, and all that constitutes our welfare and comfort. But, you say, and very sensibly, looking at the matter from your point of view, why should it not be I, who am no more stupid than any one else, who, in part if not altogether, shall undertake to work all these beneficent and providential wonders, and who shall receive and distribute at my pleasure the dollars which, in doing so, it will be necessary to disburse. Hence springs your desire, as if it were the simplest thing in the world, to create a representative who shall have influence, secure power, and obtain sugar plums ; I, on the other hand, confess that I have an ideal, which at our present rate of progress will not be realised, if it be ever realised, for ten or twelve centuries to come ; but, my dear friend, one

must advance toward one's ideal even if only at the pace of the tortoise. My ideal is the least government possible—almost the negation of government—a sort of mild anarchy compatible with order, an order springing harmoniously from the people, not from those in power. I do not desire that any one should teach me ; I shall learn what it seems best to me to learn, and I will find my own teachers ; not that any one should take care of me, for I will take care of myself ; not that any one should make roads for me ; I will associate myself with such persons as I may choose to make them for myself. I know that this is at present impossible, for they say that the individual has no *initiative* ; that the Government must take the initiative in everything, as if the Government were not composed of individuals. In short, it is needless that I should repeat here all the reasons that may be alleged against my *ideal*. You already know them only too well. What I wish to put on record is that, notwithstanding all those reasons, I am enamoured of my unrealisable system, and I regard it as apostacy to labour in behalf of that ultra-gubernamental system which at present exists, doubtless because, as a wise man has truly said, ' Humanity, considered collectively, has not yet been born.' While humanity remains unborn, if we are to look at things superficially and without analysing them, you are more than right. Since the question is one of contribution and distribution, and since the contribution is compulsory, it would be well to take possession of it in order to make the

distribution presently, especially when we consider that, as the proverb says, 'The carver always keeps the best cut for himself.'

"But when we look closely into the matter, restricting ourselves to one electoral district, believe me, Don Acisclo, even from a practical point of view, and if we consider our present interests only without concerning ourselves about the future, my system is better than yours. What is gained by distributing places at random? The district does not grow the richer by this. The inhabitants who receive offices spend their salaries out of it. There are very few who return to the district to spend in it their savings, or their spoils. Frequently there are no such savings, or if there are there is no good got of them. They vanish or evaporate, as it were, like many other ill-gotten gains. 'Easy got, easy gone.' Thus the employé, through the favour of the representative, acquires habits of luxury, scorns his former rustic and simple way of living, and accustoms himself to let the clock do his work and earn money for him, ticking away the hours and days. The bad example infects others. The son of the tradesman, the domestic servant, every one who knows how to read and write, becomes disgusted with manual labour and says to himself: 'Why should not I, too, obtain a Government situation? Why should not the representative provide a good place for me?' He who has not the remotest hope of the representative giving him a place is filled with envy and rage, and grows

indifferent and lazy that he may be the equal of the employé, of the ease and pleasantness of whose life he forms an exaggerated and fantastic conception. He fancies, and no one can drive the idea from his mind—doubtless because he does not know the time that is spent, the paper that is blotted, and the anxieties which are produced by our complicated system of transacting official business—that office hours are spent by the employés in pleasant chats, in smoking the finest cigars, and in refreshing themselves with frequent potations ; and it is supposed, besides, that opportunities to do a profitable stroke of business are constantly presenting themselves to every employé who is at all shrewd, that such a one has frequent chances of perquisites and occasionally is offered a bribe. With such notions, how is it possible that a man should be satisfied to go dig ditches, and is it not natural that he should seek to convert the ditch into an imitation of the longed-for, delightful, and sybaritic Government office ? It results from this that, as the representative gives places to the most active, efficient, and intelligent men, who naturally leave the district for a wider field of action, that only the most stupid, good-for-nothing, and inefficient remain in it ; and these, aggrieved and wounded in their self-love, or discouraged and with but little inclination for work. Consequently, there is neither industry nor art, nor advancement, nor progress possible. Thanks to the lavish favours of the representative, the district grows poorer instead of richer,

and is transformed into a nest of idlers and good-for-nothings. It is for this reason that I, through pure love for the district, do not desire to give it an able representative like the one we have now. I do not wish to give it a representative who procures and distributes so many sugar plums.

"Fortunately, your candidate's name has suggested to me the thought that in supporting him and thereby gratifying you, I shall also contribute to the welfare of the district, as I understand it. I shall free it from the blighting protection of the present representative, who seems to be a very manufacturer of sugar plums, and I shall provide it with a representative who will tell you as soon as you have elected him that if he has ever seen you before he is not aware of it and will give you no sugar plum, and, as a consequence, agriculture may again flourish, useful industries be created, and the corruption which is to-day eating away the core of society disappear. Yes, friend Don Acisclo, I made the acquaintance of Don Jaime Pimentel when I was in Madrid with my poor niece Maria and that eccentric Dr. Faustino. 'Birds of a feather flock together.' Although they differed in many respects, in many others they resembled each other. Don Jaime, at that time very young, was a perfect Adonis. Always dressed in the height of the fashion, powdered and perfumed and neat as a pin, although he was a brave soldier, there was more of Cupid than of Mars in his appearance. I do not think he was a dreamer or an enthusiast like his friend the doctor. Don

Jaime always went straight to the point. Handsome, bold, and discreet, he had already had several much talked of love affairs with ladies of distinction, and he had fought three or four duels, in all of which he had come off the victor. A brilliant future was at that time predicted for him. The prediction is being fulfilled. He is not yet forty and he is already a brigadier. On his family's account, as well as for his own personal qualities, he is greatly esteemed and liked. In addition to his pay he has a small income, which makes him independent and enables him to live comfortably. Don Jaime must have two thousand dollars a year. He has no need of this district. I cannot understand why he should desire to represent it when he might represent any district he chose. He owns in the neighbourhood of this town an olive plantation which his father, a soldier like himself, bought with money won at play. This is the only bond, so far as I know, that attaches him to this district. I repeat, then, that I cannot understand why he should wish to be our representative ; but I take it for granted that once he has attained his desire he will turn his back upon us, send us about our business, and not give us an atom of sugar plum. As this is precisely my most cherished wish, I have resolved (remaining silent as to my reasons in order not to alarm your other adherents) to support your candidate. Count upon me, therefore, to elect Don Jaime Pimentel representative, and believe me your affectionate friend."

This was the letter that had so greatly rejoiced the heart of Don Acisclo. The chief thing was that Don Juan should aid him in his undertaking, be his motive what it might. All Don Acisclo desired was his support, and he was little alarmed by the fantastic reasons and direful prognostics in which it was founded, and which he took good care to keep to himself. Only now and then, while praising extravagantly the integrity, discretion, honesty and wisdom of Don Juan Fresco, Don Acisclo would declare that he was a *lunatic*.

"And why do you say that this Don Juan is a lunatic?" Doña Manolita once asked him.

"Why should I say so?" answered Don Acisclo. "Because he is a *lunatic*; because he is the most utterly absurd creature I have ever met with in the whole course of my life."

XII

THE TRIUMPH

LUNATIC or no lunatic, Don Juan Fresco was of great assistance to Don Acisclo, who the greater his hopes of success worked all the more actively, and was all the more anxious that those hopes should not be frustrated.

The information Don Juan had given him concerning the unfriendly character of Don Jaime Pimentel disturbed him somewhat, it is true. There was no way of retreating now, however, and the first thing necessary to be done was to defeat Don Paco, although in order to do so it should be necessary to make use of the candidate least diligent in seeking sugar plums, most forgetful of his adherents, and most indifferent to their good-will to be found in the whole kingdom.

Don Acisclo was of a hopeful nature, and the very neglect of his future representative, which any other man would have regarded as a thing to be regretted, gave rise at times in his mind to the most pleasing anticipations, by encouraging his own ambitious views.

"If the representative refuses to perform his part," said Don Acisclo to himself, "if he does not fulfil his promises and reward the services of the electors I shall have to attend to their claims, which will give me an opportunity of coming into relations with the governor of the province—perhaps even with the Minister—and, being myself the real master here, without the annoying intervention of the representative. The chief thing, then, is to obtain the victory with a large majority, and show that Don Paco is only an instrument in my hands."

To accomplish this end Don Acisclo left no means unemployed.

The elections were to take place in the autumn, and he spent the summer in a state of feverish activity.

He visited on horseback all the towns and villages (seven in number) in the district, gaining votes for his *protégé* and lessening the number of Don Paco's adherents. He even visited the capital of the district several times, and not without result, with the same object in view.

Not a few of the influential electors whom Don Paco held bound were released by Don Acisclo, who used his wealth generously. To be *bound*, in the electoral language of the district, is to owe money to the chief elector. Don Acisclo was more than liberal. He distributed at least eight thousand dollars, at ten per cent. interest, without any other security than simple promissory notes,

freeing also persons held bound by Don Paco by legal documents and money lent at fifteen per cent.

The electors of Villafria had, previously to this, been in the habit of going to vote to a neighbouring village, as there was no *table* in Villafria. Don Acisclo succeeded in having the *table* taken from the aforesaid village and given to Villafria, which, as he demonstrated, was more central and convenient.

In Villafria Don Acisclo was certain that he could "turn over the *puchero*" in favour of Don Jaime.

To "turn over the *puchero*" means to secure all the votes possible for the candidate whom it is desired to elect. "All the votes possible" are the votes of all the electors whose names are inscribed on the lists, provided they are not a thousand leagues away or dead and buried, although there have been instances in which not only the absent but even the dead have voted.

The electoral annals of the district relate that as soon as Don Paco had discovered what Don Acisclo was plotting against him, rousing himself from the apathy, or rather from the state of serene and confident tranquillity in which his absolute certainty as to the result had up to the present held him, he set himself to work to counteract the designs of his opponent. This naturally caused Don Acisclo to redouble his activity. Thus it was that he had not a moment's

rest. His life was a ceaseless round of conferences, excursions to this village or that, making of treaties, letter writing, and letter reading. Pepe Güeto constituted himself the assistant and secretary of Don Acisclo, and he too wrote, travelled, and conferred.

Doña Luz and Doña Manolita, thus deserted by Don Acisclo and Pepe Güeto, found companionship in each other's society; and both found a companion in Father Enrique, the only man, perhaps, in the whole district who took no active part in the election.

The priest had manifested an interest in it only in the beginning, when he had sought to dissuade Don Acisclo from mixing himself up with politics; but Don Acisclo never allowed himself to be persuaded by any one, and when his nephew saw that this was the case he ceased his efforts, and never again even allowed it to be perceived that he so much as knew in what a *mare magnum* his uncle was engulfed.

The latter had already begun to be seriously annoyed by the indolence and want of punctuality of the candidate. The candidate had promised to visit the district; the elections were now near at hand, and Don Jaime had not come. His opponent was already installed in the house of Don Paco, promising places when he should again return to power, which would be soon, selling his influence, and gaining the good-will of the electors.

Don Jaime, meanwhile, not only had not come,

but scarcely ever even deigned to write, except to Don Acisclo, and this only at rare intervals, and in a dry and laconic style.

But be this as it might, matters had now gone, too far for Don Acisclo to retreat. His honour was at stake in the result, and even if Don Jaime had been Satan himself, he would still have moved heaven and earth to secure his triumph in the coming contest.

In short, not to weary my readers, I will say here that Don Acisclo reaped at last the reward of his labours.

The day of the election arrived, and Don Acisclo triumphed. Don Jaime Pimentel was elected representative of the district by a large majority.

There were some who hinted that Don Acisclo secured this result by means of trickery and deceit ; but this could not be proved ; we should, consequently, refuse to give ear to their insinuations.

Don Jaime Pimentel, without having stirred from the capital, almost without having written a letter, without concerning himself in the least in the matter, had the satisfaction of receiving the official notification of his election, with only two insignificant and ill-grounded protests appended to it.

Don Acisclo's rejoicing over the victory was great. What a triumph was his ! What a convincing proof of his power had just been given ! With an invisible, careless, and indolent candidate, with so powerful, so remarkable, so skilful an opponent, a very phoenix and model of electors, he had

succeeded in gaining the victory, and gaining the victory by a large majority. After giving due credit to his own wonderful capacity for politics, he acknowledged himself indebted for the victory only to Don Juan Fresco and the numerous crowd of Bermejans who, on the day of the election, had rallied round him as their respected leader.

During all this time the friendly relations existing between Doña Luz and Father Enrique had been growing gradually closer. Even Doña Manolita, whether it was that she allowed herself to be carried away by the enthusiasm of her husband or that she shared this enthusiasm herself, had no thought for anything but the election.

Doña Luz and the priest were to a certainty the only two persons of any importance in the district, who had not made either one of the candidates the subject of their thoughts, or set their hearts on the triumph of either.

In the midst of all this political agitation they had found delightful retirement in the house of its chief promoter, and here took place the calm and lofty discussions, the pleasant conversations in which Doña Luz always learned something, in which she continually discovered new perfections in the understanding and the heart of the priest, and in which Father Enrique, on his side, was never weary of admiring the vigour and acuteness of intellect, the singular discretion, the poetic fancy, and the exquisite sensibility of his beautiful interlocutor.

Don Anselmo had occasionally taken part in

these conversations, though more rarely than formerly, for Don Acisclo had enlisted his interest, too, in the election. And Don Miguel, the parish priest, had been a constant attendant at the reunions, although the learned discussions between Father Enrique and Doña Luz exercised over him so potent a spell that after listening for a few minutes he would fall fast asleep, accompanying and animating the conversation at times with the music of loud and prolonged snores.

It resulted from all this that the only person who was in reality a constant and observant witness of the mutual affection of Doña Luz and Father Enrique and a listener to their familiar colloquies was Doña Manolita. I have no desire to make the latter, nor any other of my heroes or heroines, appear better than they are, or were. Doña Manolita was not by any means as guileless as a dove, not that she cherished enmity toward any one, but because she was not without a touch of malice, of which, perhaps, she had rather an undue share. Without being influenced by envy or bitterness, but solely through a love for the art itself, she was prone to indulge in scandal, and she was too apt to adopt in her judgment of her fellow-beings the cynical counsel, "Judge ill of others and you will be sure to judge aright."

Thanks to the affectionate respect with which Doña Luz inspired her, however, she always placed the most favourable construction possible on the acts and words of the latter. For this reason,

although the irresistible inclination of those two souls for each other could not long escape her notice, Doña Manolita never failed to do justice to Doña Luz, and she felt and acknowledged in her own heart that her friend had not the faintest intention of disturbing the priest's peace of mind, nor of seeking to attract him by reprehensible coquetries.

The respect and affection entertained by the doctor's daughter for Father Enrique also were great, but not so great as to render any but a favourable construction of his conduct impossible to her. Doña Manolita, then, without any thought that Doña Luz had given occasion or motive for it, began to suspect that the priest, more or less unconsciously, was in love.

Through consideration for her friend, as well as because she knew that the inhabitants of country towns are not given to a subtle analysis of motives, and that however little she might say, it would be enough to give rise to gossip, Doña Manolita did not confide the result of her observations even to her father. She confided this result only to Pepe Güeto, from whom she concealed nothing, exacting from him, however, the most profound secrecy in the matter.

The seriousness of character of both Doña Luz and the priest prevented Doña Manolita from indulging in any daring flight of the imagination. Not even in jest had she ever given the latter the faintest hint regarding the passion she imagined him to entertain. Nevertheless, she continued to

make her observations. Pepe Güeto made his observations, also. They communicated to each other afterward what they had observed. In this way they strengthened the conviction they had mutually arrived at, that Father Enrique, without being conscious of it, loved Doña Luz in a mystic and ethereal fashion, and that Doña Luz allowed herself to be loved without foreseeing any disagreeable termination to this adoration or reflecting on the serious consequences it might have, seeing in it only a tender, frank, and sinless friendship, such as she herself entertained for the valetudinarian and romantic missionary.

At this juncture an event took place which every one had now given up expecting. Suddenly, and when Don Acisclo had resigned himself to his representative's remaining invisible for his constituents, the latter wrote to him announcing an immediate visit to the district. The first place in which he would present himself was to be Villafria, visiting in their turn afterward, with due pomp, the other towns of the district.

Don Acisclo rejoiced greatly at this promised visit, which would confer upon him, he foresaw, a high degree of importance ; but he was obliged to bestir himself to arrange matters so that Don Jaime Pimentel should meet with a brilliant reception. In order to provide him, not merely with comfortable, but with luxurious lodgings, he had recourse to Doña Luz, asking her, for Don Jaime's use, for the finest of the apartments in

the family mansion which were not occupied by his nephew ; and in order to furnish him with a good horse on which to make his visits from town to town, he had recourse also to Doña Luz, asking her to lend him, for the purpose, her handsome black horse. Doña Luz, as a matter of course, acceded to both requests.

The day preceding that in which Don Jaime was to arrive every one in the village was in a state of excitement on account of the grand reception which was about to take place. Even Doña Manolita was gayer and more loquacious than usual. In the daily reunions only Doña Luz and Father Enrique were now present, all the others being engaged either in preparing for the festival or in resting from the fatigue of the preparations they had already made.

A somewhat malicious idea now occurred to Doña Manolita, which, if carried out, she thought would throw not a little light upon the subject of her investigations. What was there to prevent her saying in jest, as it were, to Doña Luz that Don Jaime, in whose favour report spoke loudly, and who was free and unmarried, would be sure to fall in love with her the instant he saw her, in his surprise and delight to find in a country town so perfect an example of grace, distinction, and beauty ? And why should she not, while flattering the vanity of Doña Luz, play a less innocent jest upon Father Enrique, making use of the reagent of jealousy to precipitate the love that

now dwelt confused and obscure in the depths of his consciousness? Doña Manolita, while jesting with her friend, would take care to observe the effect of her words upon the priest, to see whether he changed countenance or remained unmoved, in appearance at least.

Doña Manolita put her plan into execution. She said to Doña Luz that Don Jaime would be sure to fall in love with her the instant he saw her; that Don Jaime could never have imagined that in a remote corner of the world like Villafria should be hidden such a treasure, and that in her opinion there could not be the slightest doubt as to the certainty of Don Jaime's falling in love with her.

"Who has ever come to Villafria," she continued, "that was in a position to aspire to your hand who has not fallen in love with you? Prepare, then, the arts with which you will sweeten your refusal, if you are going to refuse this lover too! But who knows? The lover I now prophesy is not a rustic or a villager, like those who have thus far presented themselves. They say he is the cream of the fashion in Madrid, and, in addition, a brave soldier and a man of extraordinary talent, with a brilliant future before him. Will you be so haughty as to refuse him too?"

Doña Luz, although she was flattered rather than offended by the words of her friend, denied the probability of the prophecy being fulfilled, saying with a modesty not altogether sincere that

Don Jaime, accustomed as he was to see beautiful women in the capital, would not even so much as notice her, much less fall in love with her.

"Besides," said Doña Luz, "there is no fear of the gentleman in question wishing to marry me. I am not what is called a good match. He would want an heiress who should stimulate his ambition, not a poor girl who would chain him down and be an obstacle to his success. Believe me, Manuela, as I have already told you a thousand times, I will never marry; I have no desire to marry. Let us not speak of such nonsense, even in jest."

Doña Manolita, while these observations were being interchanged between her friend and herself, glanced furtively at the priest, and fancied that he grew a shade paler. For the rest, the priest remained silent, and expressed no opinion either as to the probability of Don Jaime's falling in love or the unalterable resolution of Doña Luz never to marry.

At ten he retired, and the two friends were left alone.

Encouraged by the toleration with which her former jest had been received by the daughter of the marquis, who perhaps in her heart was not displeased at the flattery, Doña Manolita allowed herself to be tempted into another jest, less innocent than the previous one.

Without taking time to consider what she was saying, she spoke as follows :

"Ah, my dear, I am sorry for saying what I did about Don Jaime."

"And why are you sorry?" asked Doña Luz, innocently. "I do not think it at all likely that this gentleman from the court is going to fall in love with me in the few days he is to remain here, but as it is not altogether impossible that he should do so, and as it does not offend me that you, thinking more highly of me than I deserve, should predict this conquest, you have no need to be sorry, unless you are afraid of having encouraged my vanity."

"It is not that," answered the doctor's daughter, "that makes me regret what I have said, but the fear of having given pain to a sensitive heart, of having wounded it deeply."

"I do not understand you," said Doña Luz. "What do you mean? What sensitive heart are you speaking of?"

"The heart of Father Enrique," Doña Manolita was unfortunate enough to answer.

Doña Luz turned scarlet. It seemed as if every drop of blood in her body had rushed to her face. All the pride of her race flowed to and surged up in her heart. She thought it ridiculous and offensive to her to suppose her the object of the love of a friar.

A friar might, indeed, admire her for her intellectual endowments, esteem her for her virtues, respect her for her blameless conduct, take pleasure in her conversation and her society, and

pride himself in being her friend, but to fall in love with her seemed to her so absurd, so contrary to all the rules of propriety and to all social and religious laws, so monstrously unseemly and repugnant, that she neither desired to suppose, nor was it possible or right that she should suppose a person of the good sense, the discretion, and even the saintliness of Father Enrique capable of it. Doña Luz, then, regarded the idea of Doña Manolita as a base and wicked suspicion and the expression in words of this idea as a piece of insolence.

"What you have just said," she exclaimed, her voice trembling with anger, "is an insult, a cruel accusation against Father Enrique and against me. Father Enrique is not mad, nor have I given him any reason to be so. In order to protect my name from the attacks of slanderous tongues I have shut myself up in this town, I have withdrawn almost entirely from human intercourse, I shunned the society of the young while I was young, and before being old I have admitted to my friendship only old men like your father, the parish priest, and Don Acisclo, and all this has been of no avail to me. Because now, when I am nearly thirty years old, I have shown that I take pleasure—I confess it frankly—in the society and friendship of a servant of the Lord, tried by a thousand sufferings, broken down in health by the hardships he has endured, learned and virtuous, to this friendship, this intercourse,

only vile and impure motives can be imputed—and this not by the ignorant rustics of the place, not by those who do not know me, but by my best friend."

Poor Doña Manolita was terrified, she was filled with remorse for what she had said; tears sprang to her eyes.

"But, for heaven's sake, do not get so angry," she answered. "I do not mean to say that Father Enrique's affection for you is a dishonourable one."

"What follies are those!" interrupted Doña Luz. "What distorted ideas! What absurd distinctions are you trying to make? How is it possible to justify the love of a friar for an honourable girl? Such a love is always dishonourable. It is infamous; it is sacrilegious."

Doña Manolita, seeing that there was no means of repairing her mistake, and greatly distressed at having so grievously offended Doña Luz, whom she loved with her whole heart, said not another word, but sobbed and wept as if the most cruel misfortune in the world had befallen her.

At this Doña Luz, who, notwithstanding her haughtiness, had a kind heart, feeling that she had acted with too much harshness, begged Doña Manolita's pardon, kissing her, ready to cry herself.

As a consequence the two friends were now better friends than ever. Doña Luz was con-

vinced that Doña Manolita had had no intention of casting a doubt on the innocent nature of her relations with Father Enrique, and Doña Manolita tried to convince herself that not even as Dante loved Beatrice, as Petrarch loved Laura, or as Don Quixote loved Dulcinea, was Father Enrique capable of loving Doña Luz ; for he being a friar and she a well brought up and honourable young lady in such a love, however delicate, spiritual, and ethereal it might be, there would be a something indecorously plebeian and grotesquely sinful which accorded ill with the character of her beautiful and haughty friend.

Scarcely was the reconciliation effected when Don Acisclo and Pepe Güeto entered the room. Neither of them took notice of the traces left by the recent storm. All four supped together amicably and with a good appetite, and then retired to their slumbers.

On the following day the triumphal entry of Don Jaime into Villafria was celebrated with great pomp and circumstance. All who had horses, and many who had only mules or donkeys, went early in the morning to the railway station to meet him, with Don Acisclo at their head, and at about eleven o'clock they all returned escorting the representative mounted on the handsome black horse of Doña Luz.

Those of the boys and men of the place who had neither horses, mules, nor donkeys, went to the town gates on foot to receive the gay caval-

cade who entered the town amid the pealing of the bells, which had been all set ringing, the shouts and acclamations of the people, and the firing of as many guns as could be found fit for use in Villafria.

XIII

CRISIS

HAVING replied with so much severity to Doña Manolita's words, and then begged her pardon for this severity, Doña Luz, left alone with herself, began to reflect on the meaning and the motive of those words ; and suddenly, as if a new and strange light had flashed into the deepest recesses of her brain, it all became clear to her, and she confessed that her friend was not altogether without some appearance of reason in what she had said.

Doña Luz had been incensed, perhaps, because her own conscience, enlightened by Doña Manolita's words, had formulated a much more serious accusation against herself than any contained in those words. What radical and important difference is there between a friendship of the most tender and exclusive character, a predilection the most marked between a man and woman, neither of them yet old, and the purest, most platonic, and sublimest love ? Doña Luz put this question

to herself, and, unable to come to any other conclusion than that there was no difference, or that if there were, it was almost imperceptible and vanished in the analysis, decided that it was neither absurd nor insolent to suppose and to affirm that Father Enrique had fallen in love with her. The priest, withheld by respect for her and regard for his profession, his vows, and his position, had taken good care to refrain from manifesting his affection in a manner which should give rise to the faintest suspicion that it was other than immaculate ; but doubtless in the depth of his soul he felt this affection.

As soon as Doña Luz had settled in her own mind that this was clearly the case, she asked herself :

“ What have I done to inspire this passion ? What fault is it of mine that he should love me ? To what extent have I encouraged, and do I encourage, his affection ? ” The answer Doña Luz gave to these questions was contradictory and confused. Now she condemned herself, again she absolved herself from blame. She condemned herself when she reflected that she had concealed, much less carefully than he had done, the pleasure with which she had listened to Father Enrique’s discourses, the happiness it gave her to see him, the delight she always took in his conversation, and that, through an unreflecting but depraved instinct, she desired to appear handsome and graceful in the eyes of every one, and particularly

in the eyes of those she loved, among whom she could not but include the priest.

Then another series of considerations presented themselves to her mind to absolve her from blame. What! was it not lawful to love the knowledge, the virtue, and the intelligence which were pre-eminent in Father Enrique? What evil was there in showing him this love? And as for her care in the adornment of her person, what law, human or divine, was there that could impose upon her the obligation of concealing the gifts which Heaven had bestowed upon her, forbidding her to display them as far as was compatible with the most rigid decorum? In this way Doña Luz acquitted herself of blame; but, continuing her reflections, she reasoned further: "And if I think that he loves me, why should I not also think that I love him? If it be my vanity that makes me think he loves me, may not he be as vain as I am, and think that I also love him? And if he has given me reason to think that he loves me, have I given him less reason to think that I love him!"

Doña Luz was then obliged to confess that, considering the reserve natural to woman, the modesty and timidity with which she should watch over and moderate the promptings and inclinations of the heart, she had given greater reason to the priest to suppose her in love with him than he had given her to suppose him in love with her.

The proverb says: "Whoever proves too much proves nothing." And, as this proverb occurred

to Doña Luz, she could not prove to her satisfaction either that Father Enrique was in love with her or that she was in love with Father Enrique. She examined her conscience ; she interrogated her heart ; and, as both responded that she did not love the priest, she returned to her former conviction that only presumption could have made her imagine that the priest loved her. The only conclusion at which she could arrive with certainty, in the midst of so many contradictions, was that in their familiar intercourse and affectionate intimacy, and in the learned conversations they held together, there was something that gave room for misconstruction, something of bad taste, something at once pedantic and rustic, that seemed to her ridiculous, and whose absurdity was lessened only by the thought that her life in a country town could not well have led her into a less silly error.

Doña Luz resolved then to be more careful and less expansive in the future, and to indulge less frequently in theological and philosophical discussions, confidential conversations, and familiar intercourse with the venerable nephew of the former steward of her house.

"If there is not," she said to herself, in conclusion, "a mutual and dangerous inclination in our souls, it might be supposed that there was, and this supposition would be an offence to me. And if there is such an inclination, it would be on every account abominable, and must be torn up by the roots."

In either of these suppositions Doña Luz recognised the necessity of changing her course of conduct, the propriety—to make use of an antiquated but expressive phrase—of *mending her carelessness*.

The arrival in Villafria of the victorious and resplendent representative Don Jaime Pimentel y Moncada was almost simultaneous with the adoption of this highly prudent though somewhat tardy resolution.

In one of the lower windows Doña Luz, accompanied by her placable friend, was awaiting the appearance of the triumphal procession, whose approach was heralded by the firing of guns and the huzzas of the crowd.

Don Jaime, mounted on horseback, with Don Acisclo and Pepe Güeto riding on either side of him, preceded by a crowd of boys and men on foot, and followed by a goodly number of people on horseback and a still larger number of people on foot, at last presented himself before the gaze of our heroine.

Rumour had not erred. Don Jaime was a handsome and distinguished-looking man. He rode with grace and skill. Although he was now almost forty, he looked to be hardly thirty. His simple attire was marked in all its details by elegance and good taste.

The cavalcade stopped at the door of Don Acisclo, and the latter, accompanied by his *protégé* and guest, soon appeared in the parlour, where

Doña Luz and Manolita were awaiting their arrival.

"Let me present to you our representative, Señor Don Jaime," said Don Acisclo to Doña Luz, and then, turning to Don Jaime,

"The Señorita Doña Luz," he said, "the daughter of the late Marquis of Villafria."

The distant and confused recollections she retained of the fashionable society of Madrid, of which during the past twelve years she had caught only an occasional glimpse, the vague idea of more cultured and aristocratic surroundings, the appearance and the mode of being of high-born dames and gallants, their customs, conversations, adventures, and love affairs, such as she had imagined or conjectured them to be without ever having seen or enjoyed anything of all this, compelled, as she had been, in the morning of her life, to retire to a small country town, all suddenly rushed to the mind of Doña Luz as her eye fell on Don Jaime Pimentel, as she noted the ease and distinction of his manners, listened to the tones of his voice, and heard the few and well-chosen words he addressed to her, which neither fell short of courtesy by their coldness and formality, nor exceeded it by their gallantry, but kept exactly within the limits of the most respectful attention. For Doña Luz did not feel that it was an inferior who was addressing her, nor, on the other hand, an insolent courtier whose sense of his superiority betrays itself through his feigned

courtesy, but a man of her own class who addressed her as an equal, showing her at the same time those delicate attentions which are always due to a high-born lady. Doña Luz understood this, was pleased with it, and grateful for it. She noted well the difference in Don Jaime's tone when he spoke to Doña Manolita, later on, on being presented to her.

Don Jaime remained in Villafria two days, at the end of which time it was necessary to continue the task, already commenced, of visiting the various towns of the district.

During these two days Don Acisclo displayed the greatest magnificence. He gave, so to say, state banquets. All his relations, the doctor, the doctor's daughter and son-in-law, and Don Miguel, the parish priest, breakfasted, dined, and even supped with him and Don Jaime, whom he overwhelmed with attentions. The latter was always seated at the right of Doña Luz, with Doña Manolita on his other side.

Petra, the housekeeper, worked wonders during those two days. What stuffed turkeys, what *olla* with black pudding and sausages of various kinds, what asparagus cakes, what dishes of fricasseed giblets, what soups of artichokes, mushrooms, and peas, what dishes of jellied ham, what sweet cakes, what delicious ragouts, spiced sauces, fresh salads and syrups, did she not prepare for her master's table!

The five best musicians in the town came in the evening, bringing with them their sweet and

sonorous instruments ; and there was dancing in the upper square room, for the lower room was sanctified, as it were, by the presence of the "holy supper."

Don Jaime danced a rigadon with Doña Manolita and with one of Don Acisclo's daughters, and with Doña Luz he not only danced a rigadon but a waltz as well.

He was extremely amiable and attentive to Doña Luz, an attention and amiability which she reciprocated.

The delicate witticisms, the anecdotes that without being free were spicy, the clever and lively sketches of Madrid society of Don Jaime greatly diverted Doña Luz and even made her laugh, a thing which surprised and delighted her, for it was not easy to make her laugh. Everything Don Jaime said delighted his auditors, who all applauded him, and Doña Luz noticed that Don Jaime, without being vulgar himself, had the art of making himself understood by the vulgar, and that his speeches did not leave his hearers with gaping mouths, wondering what he had been saying, as was the case with the abstruse and lofty disquisitions of Father Enrique, who did not fail to be present on all these occasions, but with greatly eclipsed lustre and lost and confounded among the crowd.

Don Jaime lost no opportunity of complimenting and flattering Doña Luz, but he did this in such a manner that not even the vainest of women could

have thought these compliments and flatteries prompted by love, nor would she have denied, on the other hand, that they might proceed from love, for they were accompanied by so many delicate attentions that it was possible to interpret as a fear of giving offence the sentiment that prevented their transgressing certain limits. The amusing frankness with which Don Jaime complimented Doña Manolita enhanced the merit and the flattering significance of the delicacy with which he lauded the beauty and other graces of the aristocratic daughter of the Marquis of Villafria—in short, the two days passed like a flash. Don Jaime went to visit the district with Don Acisclo and Pepe Güeto, and the two friends remained as before, accompanied only at meal times and in the evenings by Father Enrique, and occasionally by the parish priest and Don Anselmo.

When Doña Manolita found herself alone with her friend, the latter, remembering that her jesting words concerning the possibility of Don Jaime falling in love with her had not offended Doña Luz, could not resist the temptation to rally her again on the same theme. The two being alone together, then, in the seclusion of the little parlour of Doña Luz, on the morning of Don Jaime's departure, the daughter of the doctor said to the daughter of the marquis :

"Come, confess that you do not think our representative a scarecrow."

"I think nothing but what is good of him,"

responded Doña Luz. "To say the contrary would be hypocrisy. He is distinguished-looking, sensible, handsome, and amiable."

"If he has made so good an impression upon you," responded Doña Manolita, "I think you have no less reason to be satisfied with the impression you made upon him, for he did not take his eyes off you for a single instant, and it was plain to be seen that he admired you enthusiastically."

"Do not talk nonsense, Manuela."

"I am not talking nonsense; I am positive of what I say."

"Your desire that people should fall in love with me and the good opinion you entertain of me yourself have made you imagine those things."

"And the compliments he paid you and the tender speeches he whispered to you—for his gestures and his expression and the glances he gave you were sufficient evidence of the nature of his words—do I imagine those things too?"

"No, you do not imagine them. Why should I deny to you that Don Jaime has paid me compliments? But although he has done so, with a respect and a delicacy, it is true, that speak highly in his favour (nor would I have permitted his doing so in any other manner), he has not for a single instant given me reason to suppose that he took any real interest in me. His words gave evidence of his good breeding, of his wit, of his esteem and consideration for me, but there was not in them an atom of sentiment; there could

not be. What! does love spring to being in a moment in real life? That happens only in plays, where it is necessary that the action should proceed rapidly and the events crowd together and reach their climax in the space of a few hours and within the limit of a few words."

"My dear, in real life, as well as in plays, to fall in love at first sight is not so uncommon an occurrence as you seem to think. Where a woman of your rare gifts is concerned, it would be a less unlikely occurrence than in most cases. I am sure of it; you have pierced Don Jaime's heart with Cupid's arrow."

"The expression you use may mean so much or so little that I scarcely know what answer to make you. If you mean to say that Don Jaime admired me and was even a little surprised (and excuse my apparent vanity in saying so) at finding in this out-of-the-way place a woman who, suddenly transplanted to a drawing-room of the capital, would be there in her natural sphere, I am not far from believing that you may be right. But, between this and inspiring a genuine affection there are a thousand leagues' distance, and I am neither vain enough to suppose nor do I wish to believe Don Jaime should travel those thousand leagues in forty-eight hours, which is precisely the time during which I have known him."

"And why do you think he should not travel, or should not already have travelled, those thousand leagues?"

"Because such a thing is not at all likely and could lead to no result. See, Manuela, there is nothing I would not confide to you. I confess that the thought of the possibility of such 'a love has occurred to me too, but I have put it away from me as folly. Don Jaime is ambitious, and his means, including his pay and his private income, are barely sufficient for himself. If he fell in love with me it would be with 'the idea of marrying me. And what could I give him? My property, managed under my personal supervision, brings me an income of 20,000 reals a year at the most. If I were not here to attend to it, it would not bring 10,000 reals, either managed by an agent or rented. My marriage with Don Jaime would bind him down hand and foot; I should be a burden on him. It is evident, then, that Don Jaime, even if by chance he felt some inclination for me, which I doubt, would drive away such an affection from him, like an insane temptation, a fatal error."

"Then you do not conceive the possibility," interrupted Doña Manolita, "of any one loving you except through self-interest? I do not understand you. What flatters a woman and wins her affection is to be loved for her own sake, not for her money."

"I am of your opinion," answered Doña Luz. "I do not know whether I should love Don Jaime or not if he were to love me; but I should certainly not love him if I were rich and suspected that he loved me from interested motives. It is

for this reason that I am resolved never to marry. If I were rich I should always suspect that I was not loved for myself, and being poor I doubt that any one would love me to the extent of sacrificing himself for my sake. Unless I should marry some young man of the neighbourhood, for whom only I would be a suitable match, since he would make no sacrifice in marrying me, nor would I be for him merely a means of enriching himself instead of the cherished partner of his life, I do not see any suitable match for me in the world. My only love will be this——”

And rising from her seat, by one of those ascetic impulses which occasionally seized her, Doña Luz drew aside her famous picture of the dead Christ and pressed her fresh and rosy lips to the livid lips of the terrible image.

Doña Manolita had already seen the picture several times, but it had never produced a more profound impression upon her than it did now, when the bloom of youth, the exuberance of life, and the animated beauty of Doña Luz were brought into contrast with this realistic representation of agony and death.

This and other conversations which Doña Luz held with her friend, the monologues in which she indulged when alone, and the thoughts that continually beset her mind nourished in the soul of the haughty girl a suspicion against which her pride rebelled and against which she struggled with all the power of her will.

Don Jaime would return. Don Jaime, after his

tour among the other towns of the district, would spend three days in Villafria. Was Doña Luz going to be so weak as to allow herself to conceive an inclination, however slight, a liking, however faint, but which should be unrequited, for the representative? The very thought of such a thing, the barest possibility of its occurrence, made Doña Luz blush with shame as if she had been already scorned by Don Jaime.

She resolved in her breast, then, to remain cold to and unmoved by the flatteries of Don Jaime when he should return, and forgetting in the presence of this new danger the danger that might lie in the intimate conversations and the learned discussions with Father Enrique and in the attention and emotion with which she listened to his discourses, she sought again with greater eagerness than ever the priest's society, taking fresh delight in it, and giving unmistakable signs of her predilection for him.

A whole week passed quickly in this fashion, at the end of which, with no less pomp and circumstance than on the previous occasion, the illustrious representative Don Jaime, accompanied by Don Acisclo and Pepe Güeto, returned to Villafria.

In Don Acisclo's house, the banquets, the splendid entertainments, the pomp and magnificence displayed on the occasion of Don Jaime's former visit, were again renewed.

XIV

THE SOLUTION OF THE CRISIS

MEANTIME Don Jaime continued to observe toward Doña Luz the same conduct as before. His attentions could not be more respectful nor his flatteries more delicate than they were. Once or twice Doña Luz had fancied that he was on the point of expressing himself with undue ardour ; but on these occasions her pride came to her aid to restrain the tongue of the flatterer, for which a slight gesture of impatience or displeasure or a severe glance sufficed.

Two days out of the three which Don Jaime was to spend in Villafria went by in this way, and the third and last day had dawned. On the following morning at daybreak Don Jaime was to depart for Madrid. It was eight o'clock and Doña Luz was already up and dressed for the street.

On this day, feeling more devout than usual, before going to church to hear mass, as was her intention, she uncovered the picture of the Christ,

knelt down before it, and began to pray with extreme fervour.

She had given orders to her maid not to enter until she should be called, and thought herself entirely alone.

In the seclusion of her own apartment, her soul melted by the fervency of her prayers, who can say what melancholy ideas presented themselves to her mind, or what pangs of tenderness pierced her heart? But presently she uttered a profound sigh, and two large tears welled from her beautiful eyes and coursed down her fresh and rosy cheeks.

The doctor's daughter, the only person who had access to her apartments unannounced, had meantime entered the room unperceived by Doña Luz, absorbed as she was in her devotions.

Doña Manolita, then, was an unobserved witness of the fervent prayers of Doña Luz, and of the tears mingled with sighs in which those prayers had ended. At sight of these, without further hesitation, she threw herself into the arms of her friend and kissed away the tears from her cheeks.

"What is the matter? Why do I find you in tears?" she asked.

But Doña Luz answered this question by another:

"How did you obtain entrance here? Why this early visit? Why have you startled me in this way?"

"Forgive me for having startled you—for having interrupted you in your prayers," answered

Doña Manolita. "You are already aware that when I come to see you so early in the morning it is because I have some good reason for doing so. I think this is the first time since the day on which I told you of my engagement to Pepe Güeto that I have availed myself of your permission to visit you informally."

"That is true; it is not of your coming that I complain. On the contrary, I am glad that you have come; but I was surprised to see you at so unusual an hour. What news, then, no less important than the announcement of your engagement, has brought you here so early to-day?"

"I come to-day as an ambassador. I am the bearer of a message whose purport you may not find it difficult to guess."

"From whom is the message?"

"From Don Jaime Pimentel," answered Doña Manolita.

A blush suffused the face of Doña Luz, who was unable to disguise from her friend the pride and pleasure which her words had caused her.

"What message have you brought me? Is this some jest of yours or of Don Jaime Pimentel?" she said.

"It is no jest; it is something serious, and very serious. Don Jaime adores you!"

"And why does he not tell me this himself? Have the cavaliers of the court grown so timid that they no longer dare to make their own declarations?"

"Do not blame him. Don Jaime assuredly does not err on the side of timidity. He gives a satisfactory explanation of his conduct. He says that a direct declaration from him would require much more time than the case allows. It could not be made with this abruptness. It would have been necessary to wait for an opportunity to prepare your mind for it beforehand. Your sense of decorum would not allow a hasty courtship, and, however good a use he might make of his time, it would not be possible to crowd so many formalities and preparations into three days. For this reason he has availed himself of my services. Last night, when he left you, he accompanied me home, and we had a long conversation together. How well I foresaw what was going to happen! You have pierced his heart with Cupid's arrow. He is madly in love with you, and has begged me to intercede for him."

"What folly is this?" exclaimed Doña Luz. "Has Don Jaime thought well over the matter? Does he know that, with a heart like mine, there must be no trifling? Has he considered whether the feeling he entertains for me is one in which the happiness of a lifetime is at stake or only a passing fancy?"

"If Don Jaime had not thought of all this he would not have asked my assistance. If he did not feel that the happiness of his future life depended on the answer you give him now, I

should not have come to speak to you in his name."

"Does Don Jaime know that I have little or no fortune?"

"He knows the exact amount of your fortune."

"Strange," said Doña Luz. "I confess that I had a much worse opinion of myself and of men. I did not think myself capable of inspiring an affection so disinterested in a man to whom ambition offers so bright a future, on whom Fortune smiles, and whom, according to common report, the haughtiest and most beautiful women of Madrid pet and spoil. Still less did I suppose that a man should conceive this disinterested affection for me in so sudden and unexpected a fashion."

"Do not doubt it; Don Jaime loves you in this way. Tell me whether you return his affection or not."

"I scarcely know what answer to make you. I am very grateful to Don Jaime, but before being grateful, before I had any cause to be so—why should I seek to conceal it from you—the distinguished appearance of Don Jaime, his good sense, his reputation as a brave soldier, the dignity and grace of his bearing, all conspired to predispose me in his favour, but my pride took alarm at the thought of cherishing a feeling that might not be reciprocated, and my pride has done all that was possible to stifle this nascent inclination."

"And now that you know how fully reciprocated is your inclination, what do you feel? What do you think of Don Jaime?"

"I think and feel—that I ought not at once to give him an affirmative answer, which he might not greatly appreciate if he thought it too easily obtained; besides it is not enough to be loved; it is necessary to think how this love is to end."

"Child! How should it end but in the priest marrying you?"

"True, and that is precisely what obliges me to reflect seriously on the matter. My character is a strange one. I do not desire that any one should love me through expediency, and it is equally repugnant to me that expediency should influence my love. If I were to marry Don Jaime, poor as I am, might it not be thought that the wish to leave Villafria and go to live in Madrid, the position of Don Jaime, his brilliant prospects, and even the material advantages which he now enjoys had influenced me in this marriage? He, on the other hand, is not rich for our rank, and I foresee embarrassments, pecuniary difficulties, the horrible prose of domestic life with insufficient means. This thought terrifies me. And it does not terrify me for myself, because of the deprivations I might have to endure, but because I blush to think that I might be the cause of a man's living oppressed by pecuniary difficulties. If he were to remain here with me, he would sacrifice to me his ambition, his career, his future.

If he were to take me to Madrid with him, we should be obliged to live there in comparative poverty. I should present a sorry figure in the society he frequents. And who knows but that in the end this might extinguish his love for me? Who knows but that, growing weary of me, he might in the end even come to hate me?"

"I see that you analyse too closely and that you take pleasure in tormenting yourself, and in putting obstacles in the way of what you most desire."

"And who has told you that I desire it? I myself do not know whether I desire it or not; I have my doubts. I do not see clearly into the depths of my soul. May it not have been gratified vanity, may it not have been a childish satisfaction at seeing myself beloved by a man of so much merit, that induced me to think that I too desired it? What is love? Is the feeling which I have in my soul, and which draws me toward this man, love? See, Manuela, why should I not tell you everything? All this is dark and confused; there is another man upon whose words I hang when he speaks, whose genius dazzles me, whose intellectual superiority subjugates me, whose virtues fill me with wonder and enthusiasm; the nobility of whose nature, the goodness of whose heart I clearly perceive, and you already know the annoyance, the disgust it would cause me that any one should, for a single instant, confound with love the sentiments with

which this man inspires me, and which with I, too doubtless inspire him? With Don Jaime the contrary of this is the case. I scarcely know him; I do not know whether he is worthy or unworthy. His understanding seems to me inferior to that of the other, and yet I feel attracted toward him. Do I perchance love in him the love he has for me, and which flatters me so greatly? Is the feeling that repels me in the other, that annihilates love, only respect for the laws that prohibit it."

"I do not understand you," interrupted Manuela. "You are not so much a child as not to know what love is—not to be able to discover it in your heart if it exists there. Is not Don Jaime ardent, handsome, brave, graceful, and sensible? Is he not free, does he not love you, does he not give you a proof of his love in wishing, as he has told me he does; to marry you? Is he not a well-born and honourable gentleman? What is the cause, then, of all those sophisms and cavillings with which you torment your brain? Tell him you will be his, love him, marry him, and you shall see how happy you will be. Give him hopes, at least, that you will love him if you do not wish at once to give your complete consent. If you give him hope he will not go to Madrid, he says, but will remain in Villafria. He will find some plausible pretext to remain here. He will give out that he has stayed here to complete the purchase of an olive plantation bordering on one of his and for which he has been negotiating."

"What you advise is vulgar—forgive the rudeness of the words—it is unworthy. I ought not to give hope of a thing of which I myself am not sure, and, if I am certain of my own feelings, it is a ridiculous artifice to conceal them by saying I will give him hope and to disclose my feelings little by little. If I do not love Don Jaime I should not deceive him by fallacious hopes. He asks my hand and seeks to gain my affections and make me his wife without my having given him any encouragement ; and, if I love him, I should be frank and tell him so at once, knowing that he loves me. Although he may set little value on a consent so easily and so soon obtained, I should still give him this consent."

"I am entirely of your opinion," replied Doña Manolita. "Give him this consent. Let him hear it from your own lips and he will be the happiest of men."

"And when and how shall I give it to him? No ; tell him nothing. I am ashamed. Be silent, be silent, for pity's sake ! Let him go and leave me tranquil in my retreat."

"Nonsense, child, don't be foolish. How is he to go without an answer after the step he has taken ?"

"And how can I answer him if I do not know what to answer him ? Do you not think that he will repent of his proposal as soon as I have given him my consent ? Do you think that he loves me truly, with his whole heart, as I desire to be loved, as I would love him if he loved me ?"

"I do, indeed, believe it. His words inspire belief in the mind most inclined to doubt. Listen to him and you will be convinced. I will venture to tell you—for heaven's sake, Luz, do not be angry—I was unable to resist his prayers. I brought him with me. He is waiting in the square room above. I will run and send him to you." Before Doña Luz had consented, her friend, fleet as a deer, had gone in search of the representative brigadier.

Doña Luz hardly knew what she felt. She was greatly agitated; she was about to find herself alone for the first time in her life with a youthful lover in this modest retreat in which she had passed the best years of her life. Vague dreams of love, words of tenderness, ecstatic joys of the soul, suddenly presented themselves to her mind, not now in connection with an ideal and ethereal being, the creature of her imagination, but with a human being, real and full of life, whose admirable qualities it gave her delight to contemplate, and whose affection for her flattered her pride.

The melancholy image of Father Enrique passed before her mind, saddening her. She looked at the face of the dead Christ, and she fancied she saw in it a resemblance to the priest.

It was broad daylight. The sun streamed in through the windows, and yet she felt something like a shudder as she contemplated the picture. She went quickly and covered it with the other picture.

As if to remove from her thoughts every gloomy image, she then went to the mirror and gazed at her reflection in it—a picture of grace and beauty and youthful bloom, and it seemed to her natural, inevitable, almost, that Don Jaime should love her.

Then her thoughts reverted to Father Enrique, but not with sadness as before. The very love she entertained for Don Jaime would explain whatever might be liable to misconception in her inclination toward the priest. This impelled her to believe that she was in love with Don Jaime. Loving Don Jaime, whatever might have been strange in her friendship with the missionary, disappeared in her eyes. All that had at times seemed to her ridiculous in her relations with him disappeared and everything was explained.

These thoughts passed in an instant's space through the mind of Doña Luz. An instant only did Don Jaime delay in making his appearance at the door of the little parlour, which Doña Manolita had left open.

Don Jaime had no need to ask permission to enter. Doña Luz was awaiting him; she saw him approach, and received him in silence.

Doña Manolita paused at the threshold and Don Jaime entered the room alone.

He hastened to Doña Luz, knelt before her and said in a voice full of emotion:

"You already know what I would say. My happiness or my misery depends upon you. Here I await my sentence."

A discourse more elaborate than this would have been ridiculous on such an occasion ; any art he might have used would have been vain ; any precaution he might have taken, repellant.

The door of the parlour had remained open and Don Jaime was on his knees before Doña Luz. It seemed as if he had just surrendered at discretion, that he had said all he had to say, and that it was her part now to speak and impose conditions.

Doña Luz felt her pride greatly flattered. This *dandy*, this brave soldier, this man with a great career, a brilliant future before him, was here at her feet, subjugated by her beauty, without any other cause for this subjugation than the sudden and ardent passion with which she had inspired him.

Doña Luz was silent ; she could find no word to say ; but in her countenance, incapable of dissembling, and where all her feelings were reflected, were depicted joy, tender emotion, and pleased surprise.

As the snows of winter at times linger long upon the ground, and by this delay lend new vigour to the germinal force of spring, which suddenly appears and makes its presence felt, covering the trees with verdure and the fields with flowers, so did the longing to love, repressed hitherto by maidenly reserve, and dormant, as it were, till now, awake to sudden life in the impassioned and virginal heart of our heroine. Doña Luz felt the

spring of life awake to being in her soul ; she heard the birds sing ; she saw, as in a magic mirror, glimpses of paradise ; she inhaled the intoxicating perfume of enchanted roses, and it seemed to her as if the soft warmth and the golden light of an ideal sun diffused themselves through her breast, illumining and vivifying a world of exquisite beauty, newly created and hidden there.

Then the fear assailed her that this wonderful creation might return to nothingness, might vanish like a dream, and she exclaimed at last, with strange candour :

"You are not deceiving me ? Is this indeed true ? You love me ?"

"With my whole soul," answered Don Jaime, taking her beautiful hand in his, and pressing a kiss upon it.

"Do not be foolish. Rise," said Doña Luz, gently withdrawing her hand from Don Jaime's clasp.

"I shall not rise," he replied, "until I know my fate."

"Don Jaime, for pity's sake, what would you have me say ? I cannot tell whether I love you or not ; but if the pleasure it causes me to believe myself loved, and the fear of losing this belief, are symptoms of love, then I think I love you."

Doña Luz blushed as she had never blushed before as she pronounced these words, and Don Jaime rose to his feet, showing in his countenance

the gratitude and joy which the confession of Doña Luz had given him.

Then he said :

“ Cast away all fear, and be assured that I shall never cease to love you with a love equalled only by the respect and the profound admiration which are your due.”

Having arrived at this point in their mutual confessions, and the way lying so smooth and easy before them, everything was thus tacitly settled in this one brief interview.

Doña Luz was agitated and confused, but the severe dignity of her countenance and her bearing would have restrained the boldest lover.

Don Jaime believed that he possessed the love of Doña Luz, yet not even by another kiss on her hand did he venture to show that he returned this love and was grateful for it.

In short, the character of Doña Luz being such as it was, and she and Don Jaime having mutually confessed their love, there was no need for further vacillation, discussion, or delay. The marriage must, of necessity, now follow quickly.

Doña Luz was too vehement in her nature to maintain a cold and calm conversation on indifferent subjects when alone with the man to whom she had just almost said, “ I love you,” while her dignity and purity left neither the desire nor the hope of obtaining the most innocent caress, to ask for which, indeed, Don Jaime knew would be to expose himself to her displeasure.

Hence the embarrassment in which Doña Luz and her lover found themselves as soon as they had mutually confessed their affection. Doña Luz, especially, was ill at ease. She was ashamed of what she had said, she wished to shun the looks of this man, yet she could not make up her mind to leave him, fearing lest her flight should seem like an artifice or a piece of childish affectation, ridiculous in a woman of twenty-eight.

Fortunately Doña Manolita divined by instinct the embarrassment of the situation and soon freed her friend from it, presenting herself once more in the parlour.

Later on, at the breakfast table, in the presence of Don Acisclo and Father Enrique and the other guests, and when she had recovered from her first emotion, Doña Luz was able to speak to Don Jaime with composure. She found him disposed to agree to all her wishes. As neither she nor Don Jaime had any one to consult but themselves, they decided to be married quietly and as soon as possible.

In order to explain his prolonged stay in the town without making the engagement public, Don Jaime announced his intention of remaining a week longer in Villafria, in order to come to a decision regarding the olive plantation, for the purchase of which he had been negotiating.

XV

FIRST SKETCH OF A MATRIMONIAL IDYLL

IT is difficult to keep anything secret in a small place. Everything is known the instant it occurs, no matter what efforts may be made to conceal it. It is not to be wondered at, then, that the engagement between Don Jaime and Doña Luz, which there was no reason for concealing, should immediately come to the knowledge of every one in Villafria.

Don Jaime's prolonged stay in the town was consequently attributed to its true motive, and no one regarded the purchase of the olive plantation as anything more than a pretext.

This case of love at first sight, and especially the suddenness of the engagement, gave rise to much comment, discussion, and gossip.

In the country towns of Andalusia there is nothing that creates so much surprise as a sudden marriage. In that part of the country it is the custom to do everything with a great deal of deliberation. In no place is the English proverb,

"Time is money," less applicable than here. In no place is there more frequent occasion in daily life for the classical and ultra-Spanish saying, "To make time"—that is, to lose time, to spend it without regretting its loss or finding tedious its slow, infinite, and silent passage; but there is nothing in which procrastination is carried so far in Andalusia as in the matter of engagements. The wisdom which, recognising the serious and important nature of matrimony, has suggested the counsel, "Consider well before you marry the step you are about to take," contributes to this in part; and the fact that this considering "well the step you are about to take" is extremely amusing contributes much more to it. It is the best means of killing or of "making time"; it is an agreeable occupation which the man who has nothing else to do may engage in, and which he no sooner marries than he loses.

Hence, doubtless, the interminable engagements of my native province, where are given besides the most admirable examples of unshaken constancy which the annals of romance can offer. Here are to be found cases of engagements dating from the time when the lover began to study Latin at school, continuing during his studies in polite literature, law, or medicine, and terminating in marriage only when he becomes judge of the lower court or titular physician. During all this time the engaged couple write to each other when they are separated, and when they are in the same town they see each

other at mass in the mornings ; they meet two or three times again in the course of the day ; they chat together during the hour of the siesta, see each other in the afternoon during the promenade, go to the same party in the evening, and after supper see each other again and chat together at the window, and there are nights when they remain once more chatting together, their faces pressed to the bars until the rosy-fingered dawn appears in the east.

In proof of this it is related of a certain lover of Antequera that, being obliged to marry after an engagement of eight years, he soonⁿ afterward fell into low spirits from not knowing what to do with his time. I have heard it also related of another lover, a native of Carcabuey, in proof of the firm conviction entertained in that part of the country that matrimony requires a great deal of consideration before entering upon it, that his future mother-in-law, reflecting that her daughter had been for thirteen years receiving his attentions without his having ever proposed to her, and that she was beginning to decline in her looks, resolved to ask the lover what his intentions were. And having summoned the necessary resolution to ask the question, the lover responded, very much surprised and a little displeased : " Good heavens, señora ! Is it at the suggestion of some secret enemy of mine that you ask me this question ? "

Such wholesome doctrines prevailing in Villafria with regard to the duration of engagements, the

reader will understand the surprise caused by the suddenness, the lack of consideration, with which Doña Luz had come to a decision in this important matter.

"This is something sudden," said one.

"Why," said another, "the matter is very simple. If she declared that it was her intention never to marry, it was only through self-conceit, because she scorned the people of the place ; but no sooner did a coxcomb arrive here from the capital than she lay in wait for him and caught him in her toils, as a spider catches a fly."

The lovers she had disdained, who had before been resigned, consoling themselves with the supposition that the scorn of Doña Luz sprang from her love for God and heaven, when they knew that Doña Luz had so strong a liking for the earth and for a man like themselves, could not forgive her either, and censured her for her fickleness.

"She has thrown herself into the arms of the first comer," they exclaimed, "without either loving or esteeming him, for neither love nor esteem are of so sudden growth. The desire to shine in Madrid is what has tempted her."

Even the gipsy who made and sold buns at the corner of the street near Don Acisclo's house, a very sententious person called La Filigrana, more famous for the pithiness of her sayings than Pedro Lombardo himself, said ironically:

"Doña Luz is an Oriental pearl, and the pearl

takes no thought of the diver's worth ; what it desires is to be caught and carried to shine in the Olcn del Oclaye."

Not a few of these comments reached the ears of Doña Luz, but they made no impression on her heart. There was no strain of truth in them that found an echo in her clear and tranquil conscience. Doña Luz was a woman, and she had a soul, and felt the need for love. Her love, without a visible and human object on which to expend itself had been dormant, as it were, until now. A worthy object had at last presented itself to her, and Doña Luz dedicated at once to this object all her love. Every day, every hour that passed, confirmed her more and more in the belief that Don Jaime was worthy of her love. The very love of Don Jaime, the disinterestedness with which he had offered himself to her, unprotected, poor, and an orphan as she was, were the best and surest guarantee of his merit.

As to her marrying through the desire of going to shine in Madrid, Doña Luz smiled disdainfully when this remark was repeated to her. Doña Luz was resolved not to go to Madrid so long as she could avoid doing so, but to remain in Villafria, and to reside in the ancestral house—to have her headquarters, her nest there ; to attend to her property, improving and adding to it ; to repress every jealous inclination in her heart, and not only to consent to his going, but to urge her husband to go alone to the capital and to win there a name

for himself as a statesman and a soldier. Doña Luz wished in this to follow the example of Vittoria Colonna and to await her hero, her lover, when he should come to repose in this rural retreat which her love would make attractive and delightful.

She did not wish, in short, to be a burden on him in Madrid, but a rest, a refuge, a holy and sweet consolation in Villafria.

During her tender conversations with Don Jaime, Doña Luz disclosed to him her whole plan. She desired for him glory, power, influence at court, varied with a series of idylls in Villafria, where she would await him like a beneficent Armida, when he came to repose in her arms, covered with fresh laurels. Don Jaime urged Doña Luz to accompany him to Madrid, but Doña Luz resisted his persuasions with so much determination that Don Jaime was obliged to make a compromise, and to consent that, for the present, that is to say until both were much richer than they now were, Doña Luz should continue to reside in Villafria.

All this was so romantic that the reader, aware of it, will assuredly not be disposed to find fault with Doña Luz as did the people of the town; but if they should do so it will be for contrary reasons—for being too proud and eccentric, for preferring to live many months in the year separated from her husband to being a constant source of prosaic and pecuniary difficulties to him

in Madrid, which would be enough to destroy the strongest love.

Doña Luz, her future thus marked out with firmness by her own hand, found in her soul-motive only for satisfaction and happiness. All her being sprang into bloom. The sweet longing to be a wife and mother filled her with thoughts of ineffable tenderness. An interior light illumined her mind, transfiguring her, and seemed to reflect itself on her countenance, lending her a new and divine beauty. As the fields break into bloom at the coming of the spring, as the heavens are dyed with purple and gold when the sun is about to make its appearance above the horizon, thus did Doña Luz now appear more blooming and refulgent than ever.

Her happiness was of so dignified, so generous, and so trustful a nature, and the divine expression this happiness lent her lovely face was so winning that censure was at last disarmed, and those who looked at her could not help but call down a blessing upon her.

In her mind, with the exception of one little corner deep in its inmost recesses which remained wrapped in shadow, all was light and joy. There scarcely perceptible, was a germ, a seed, as it were, of uneasiness and disquietude. Doña Luz, almost unconsciously, with the instinct of self-preservation, sought to uproot this seed, to stifle this germ, in order that it might not bear poisonous fruit.

Doña Luz reflected on her anomalous relations

with Father Enrique, on the warm friendship and affection he had always manifested toward her: It is plain that this friendship, this affection, could, in the mind of Doña Luz, have nothing, even remotely, in common with love. But for this very reason her affection for the priest should remain unchanged, and the proofs of this affection should neither cease nor diminish, under penalty of giving rise to the suspicion in her soul that they were of the same nature as the affection she cherished in her soul for her future husband ; that she had been capricious and inconstant ; that she had bestowed upon one man, not the love, free and intact, which she had never yet given to any one, which she had carefully treasured in her heart, but a part, and only a part, of what she had already bestowed upon and then taken away from another.

Doña Luz then endeavoured, although in vain, to be as amiable and affectionate as before with Father Enrique ; and, as she saw that this was impossible, as she saw that from the contact of her soul with the soul of the priest, whether by means of words or glances, resulted, not as before, heat and magnetic light, but ice, she explained to herself this fact by the hypothesis that there are not in the human heart energy and vigour sufficient for various affections, and that where one affection predominates the others decline and suffer diminution, although they may be of a very different class and nature.

Father Enrique's soul continued to be as before

for Doña Luz, clear, transparent, and impenetrable as the unfathomable sea that girdles the Andalusian coast. The sun floods its depths with light, and, to a certain distance, all within is clearly visible; but its profoundest recesses, with their changing hues, opaline tints, silvery reflections, and flashing lights baffle the gaze that seeks to penetrate them, and present to it only confused and indistinct images. Father Enrique had not changed, apparently, at least. The same serenity, the same sweetness characterised him as ever. The tone of his voice remained unaltered, whether speaking of Don Jaime or addressing him. In conversing with Doña Luz the priest showed the same affectionate benevolence as formerly. Not a single word did he utter in which could be perceived the faintest tinge of irony, pique, or disappointment.

"Either Father Enrique has an extraordinary amount of self-control," thought Doña Luz, "or he has never cared for me. It would be rather absurd if Manuela's suspicion, which, when I heard it, I regarded as a base and wicked insinuation, should, after all, derive its chief countenance from my own ridiculous vanity, and, analysing the matter more closely, have flattered instead of vexing me. No, there is not a doubt of it; Father Enrique respects me; he has a high opinion of me, thanks to his too indulgent estimate of my character; he likes me as a fellow-being to whom he is bound by ties of friendship; but anything

more than this is a fantastic dream, has no existence except in my own vain fancy. And it is best that it should be so."

And as Doña Luz ended she sighed as if her heart had been relieved of a heavy weight.

On other occasions, anxious to lighten her conscience still further, to relieve herself of all responsibility, although by the arguments just adduced she had demonstrated to her own satisfaction that no responsibility of a nature that could trouble her conscience rested upon her, Doña Luz went over in her mind all the favours she had bestowed upon the priest; she deprived of their value and significance all the proofs of affection she had given him; she reduced them all to the narrow proportions of a cold and austere friendship, like that which may and should exist between pupil and master, casting from her mind or effacing from it every painful recollection, and holding herself guiltless even of the most innocent act of coquetry.

Meanwhile the days followed one another, and the day of the wedding, which was to be a very simple one, was close at hand.

Don Acisclo and Pepe Güeto, however, had made a trip to Seville to buy presents for the bride, each according to his means.

Don Acisclo's present was magnificent. It consisted of a pair of diamond earrings and a diamond brooch which cost him two thousand dollars. Pepe Güeto's was a bracelet costing ten thousand reals.

Don Jaime had ordered some ornaments and jewels from Madrid which were now hourly expected.

Don Jaime manifested the utmost impatience ; he seemed deeply in love and urged on the preparations for the wedding.

The nearer the longed-for day came, the more tender were the lovers, the more interminable their conversations. They rode on horseback together, Doña Luz on her black horse, Don Jaime on a handsome horse of Don Acisclo's. They also took walks together in company with Doña Manolita, who was greatly delighted to have been the mediatrix in this happy union.

Father Enrique continued to dine at the house of Don Acisclo, but alleging his studies as an excuse, he breakfasted in his own house, where Ramon prepared and served him a frugal breakfast.

He now, too, either remained away from the evening gatherings altogether, or retired earlier than had been his wont, but there was nothing strange in this.

Don Acisclo and Don Pepe Güeto set him the example. And, indeed, the whispered conversation of the lovers and their obliviousness to all that surrounded them offered little inducement to any other course.

Don Anselmo dropped in now and then, remaining but a short time. He no longer entered into discussions with Father Enrique, nor ex-

pounded his philosophical theories, for Doña Luz paid no attention to any one but Don Jaime.

Thus the reunions which had once been so animated were now for the most part deserted.

Don Acisclo, Don Anselmo, Pepe Güeto, and the parish priest would slip away, and there would only remain the lovers, engaged in their eternal "chit-chat," as Doña Manolita called it; the latter, who resigned herself with pleasure to playing the rôle of duenna; Palomo, the greyhound, who would lie down at the feet of Don Jaime, for whom he had conceived a strong attachment, instinctively divining, perhaps, the love he bore his mistress; and at times the parish priest, Don Miguel, on, whom the whispering of the lovers produced precisely the same effect as the disputes and the disquisitions of the philosophers had done, lulling him gently to sleep, and causing him to dream, perhaps, of the important part he himself was going to act in the delightful drama that was going on, when he should be called upon to pronounce the nuptial benediction.

Don Jaime and Doña Luz, having no one to consult but themselves, and having resolved that the ceremony should take place with as few formalities and as quietly as possible, all the necessary preparations were soon made, and it now wanted only four days to the celebration of the marriage.

It had been Don Acisclo's desire to invite all his relations and connections to the wedding, and to celebrate the event by a feast and a ball; but

to this Doña Luz, thanking him warmly at the same time for his kind intentions, as well as for his sumptuous present, refused to consent, saying that she wished her marriage to be, if not a secret, at least a private one.

"A marriage with muffled bells," said Don Acisclo, who was greatly addicted to the figurative use of the word bell.

"Just so; a marriage with muffled bells," answered Doña Luz.

XVI

MEDITATIONS

FATHER ENRIQUE, as we have already said, was not idle during all this time ; he did not limit his activity to disputing and conversing in the reunions at Don Acisclo's.

In the solitude of his own room he passed hour after hour reading and writing.

As he was extremely modest, he cherished no expectation of producing a book which, when given to the world, should greatly benefit humanity, and yet he was now unceasingly engaged in the composition of an extensive work. It was an apology, or new defence of Christianity, against the fiercest attacks of the Pantheists, Positivists, and Materialists.

The rare and winning candour of the priest's character revealed itself in every word of this remarkable work. One might have called it, rather than a polemical work, a monologue, or rather a dialogue, in which two voices in the soul spoke alternately. His understanding, cold and calculating,

independent of faith, proposed as many arguments—now metaphysical, now historical, now based on the experimental sciences—as can be brought against supernatural revelation, the immortality of the soul, and even the existence of God. And his understanding, too, illumined by a higher light and supported and strengthened by faith, answered these arguments, satisfying its own doubts with the victory.

In this work there was nothing artificial or conventional. It was the individuality of the priest truthfully reflected. It was as if faith, imprisoned in the fortress of his soul, struggled with human speech, whose object it was not to gain the victory over faith, but to use all possible efforts to that end in order to behold faith come out victorious and triumphant over those very efforts.

Since the arrival of the representative Don Jaime the priest had gradually shortened the length of his visits at Don Acisclo's, and consequently spent more and more time in his solitary abode.

His book did not progress the more rapidly on this account. On the contrary, it made less progress than before. The priest would seat himself at his desk, place before him the paper ready to receive his thoughts as they occurred to him, to be afterward arranged according to a judicious and well-considered plan ; then he would take up his pen. But all was in vain. No idea presented itself to his imagination with the clearness or conciseness necessary to its expression. A sea of

thoughts and feelings surged up in his mind, in which a tempest seemed to rage, mingling together in confusion, and producing not a harmonious creation, but a tenebrous chaos.

In this way, laying down his pen, the priest would sit hour after hour, his elbow resting on the table, his head leaning on his hand, without making any effort to write. At times he would walk with hasty steps up and down the room, again he would throw himself into his chair and bury his face in his hands. Never before had he felt himself so inactive, so incapable, so barren of ideas.

One day he closed the volume in which he wrote down his notes with disgust, and began to write on some loose sheets of paper. Doubtless inspiration then came to his aid. His pen ran on swiftly as if the torrent of his ideas, seeking egress, had imparted to it an irresistible motion.

By what strange magic was it that the priest found this facility in writing on these loose sheets when he had found it so difficult to write in his book? The magic was not in the book nor in the paper, but in the subject.

He had just come to the determination to write on another subject, a subject of singular importance to him, which had occupied his thoughts for a long time past, which weighed upon his mind, and of which it was necessary to unburden himself. For this reason it was that his pen ran swiftly.

The priest was transferring to the paper the hidden secrets of his soul.

"It does not suffice, O my God," he wrote, "that I should confess myself to Thee! What darkness is there that Thy light cannot pierce? What abyss can Thy glance not penetrate? Thou knowest all things. There is nothing I can make known to Thee. All I can do is to ask Thy pardon. But the weight of this secret of my soul overwhelms me so long as it dwells formless and unexpressed in its depths, known to Thee alone. Yes, confession, independent even of its sacred virtue as a sacrament, is, indeed, a well-spring of consolation; it is at least a relief. To confess our pangs, our humiliations or our sins to another is to share them with that other. But to what fellow-creature can I confess? My friends, the wise directors of my conscience, those in whom I was wont to confide, are far away in the islands of the sea in the distant East. It is true that any priest seated in the confessional, invested by God Himself with the power of imposing penance and absolving sin, receives by divine grace what, perhaps, he has not received from nature—lucidity of spirit to understand all he hears. And yet I cannot resolve to confess myself to the good and amiable Don Miguel. What should I say to him? Have I anything definite or conclusive to tell him? Have I sinned by breaking the divine commandments? My fault is grave, very grave, and yet I cannot confess it to Don Miguel without entering into details and mentioning names, without compromising one whom I have no right to compro-

mise. I may throw myself at the feet of this good priest and say to him that I am proud, envious, unworthy, and ask him to impose a penance upon me and absolve me ; but the worst part of my fault will remain unconfessed ; for a thousand reasons it cannot be communicated to him.

“Am I then deprived of the consolations of confession ? To a certain extent I can cast off the weight that oppresses me, delivering my soul from it by putting it into written words, although no one may read them. Language is a divine gift, and possesses among its other virtues a wonderful power of consolation. Thoughts that are expressed and defined in words are, as it were, bound and imprisoned in them, and no longer torture and rend the soul like thoughts that remain in it vague and unexpressed. Besides, in order to know myself better, to recognise the nature of my malady, it is well to present it before me in a clear and distinct manner. How should we know what our external aspect, our appearance is, but through its reflection in the glass ? So with the soul, although we feel the anguish that rends it, we cannot understand the nature or the cause of this anguish so long as it remains confused in the depths of the soul itself and is not expressed and defined in human speech. I wish, then, courageously to look into my soul, and, tearing off the bandages that hide them, examine with my own eyes my wounds.

“Beauty is the work of God ; but let us not call

God to account for the use that may be made of His work. The potter fashions an exquisite vase ; but he is not therefore responsible for the poison that may be put into it and which our thirsty lips drain, perhaps, to the dregs.

"She is beautiful both in mind and person. Her eyes, blue as the heavens, reveal only pure and sinless thoughts and feelings. I cannot accuse her of the slightest desire, even instinctive and unconscious, to allure. No treacherous plot, no blind impulse to work my ruin lurked in her soul ; and this has been the cause of my ruin. Against the effects of such a plot, of such an impulse, I should have known well how to protect myself. I should not even have found it necessary to protect myself. Knowing the intention, conscious of the deceit, instead of being attracted I should have been disgusted. Her innocence, her holy purity—these have been the weapons with which she has pierced my soul. Believing me dedicated to God, the recipient of His favours, a witness of His perfections, she could neither suspect me of error nor did she arrogantly presume that for her I could forget God. Therefore did she reveal to me the hidden beauty of her soul with all the fearless candour, of innocence. She opened her heart to me, she revealed to me the inner depths of her conscience, and I became intoxicated with its perfume.

"A cunning plan, skilfully framed by my passion, ripened in my mind, presenting itself as

exempt from sin. In forming this plan I relied on the qualities of her character and the circumstances with which blind fate had surrounded her. Who was there here for her to love? If she had remained to the age of twenty-eight without allowing her fancy to be captivated by any man, was it not probable, almost certain, that she would remain so to the end of her days? All the force of will, all the treasure of affection that I discovered in her soul, all the elevated and generous thoughts which exercised her mind, all those nameless aspirations, infinite, divine, which germinated in her spirit in an ideal and perennial spring, all those heavenly blossoms blooming in the sheltered garden of her fancy and cultivated with care by her right reason, disposed by nature, education, and divine favour to righteousness and purity, to whom should she dedicate and consecrate them? To God, and only to God, I thought. But, with selfish intent, hardly confessing it to myself, I presently determined in my own mind that I was to be the channel through which so much worth should return to God, from whom it had proceeded.

“Surrounded by uncultivated rustics as she is, who is there to comprehend her but me? Who but me could direct and explain her vague dreams? Who interpret the problems that beset her mind? Who point out to her the aim toward which to direct her prayers and aspirations that they might not fly wide of the mark, and fall to earth without

touching it? Who could unfold to her reason, eager for truth, the sublime mysteries of our faith? Who explain to her the causes of things and the laws that govern them, as far as it is possible to know these causes and these laws? Who serve to guide her spirit in its daring flights, when it soars above the natural world and the visible universe, longing to reach its inaccessible, eternal, and exhaustless source? In a word, I pleased myself with the thought that I was her master, her friend, the depositary of her thoughts, the confidant of her emotions, that at my pleasure I could moderate or accelerate the pulsations of her enthusiastic heart. But never, O, my God, did it occur to me to rob Thee of the torrent of love that flowed from it toward Thee. But I selfishly thought to open in my spirit a channel for that clear, impetuous, and crystal current through which it might reach its goal. Never did I dream of being that goal, but only the channel through which its limpid waters should flow, spreading beauty on their way and reflecting the tranquil skies and the pomp of nature, more beautiful in the reflection, and a thousand times more enchanting than in reality.

“How hast Thou punished me, my God! How hast Thou punished me! But if in the punishment I recognise and venerate Thy justice, I thank Thee also for Thy mercy. What did I not deserve for my crime? My base calculations have been defeated, my mad sophisms have reacted against

myself. I have been caught in the net I had so carefully spread.

* * * *

“And how could I have been so blind as not to see all this, and to be horrified by it? I believed it all ethereal, holy, pure. There have even been moments of madness in which I reproached her with being fickle, false, perjured, faithless. Good heavens! How mad I was! She promised me nothing, she bound herself to me by no tie. She loved me before as she loves me now. No, there has been no change in her. If she had divined before what I concealed in my breast, it would not have been necessary for Don Jaime to come to make her turn from me with horror. I myself did not perceive it before. Now I see it, and it horrifies me. Abominable thoughts, wicked plans, hellish incantations were engraven on my breast, as on a brazen tablet, but in sympathetic ink, as it were, that it needed the reagent of jealousy to make visible to my shame.

“Heaven has humiliated my pride. I set a higher value upon myself than I deserved. My labours, my works of penance, my long and dangerous pilgrimages and missions had gained for me, I thought, the favour of Heaven; had clothed this mortal breast with a shield and diamond breast-plate which rendered me invulnerable. I dreamed that I had drowned in the limitless sea of divine love all earthly and perishable affections. I fancied that I could now love

no one and nothing, except through the love of God. I believed that all perishable beauty, all goodness of the creature, all grace, all light, would be in my sight only the faint and cold reflection of eternal beauty, goodness, grace, and light, whose refulgence I imagined I caught glimpses of, in whose flames I took delight in feeling my heart burn. How did the evil spirit flatter me in order to bring about my fall! How cunningly did he deceive me! How blind was my confidence in the beginning! As the skilful gardener, when he discovers a noble plant among the weeds, carries it to his garden and cultivates it with care, that the vices contracted among the weeds may be cured, and through his efforts the plant may prosper and produce fragrant and beautiful flowers and delicious fruits, thus did I, puffed up with vanity, finding the beautiful soul of this woman, propose to myself to improve it, to beautify it, and make it blossom and produce fruit abundantly in virtue, knowledge, and grace. This is the form in which the evil spirit presented his suggestions to me; this was all I acknowledged to myself; but in the depths of my corrupt mind other thoughts boiled, other designs swarmed like a nest of vipers hidden among health-giving plants. All that is incumbent upon me now is to praise God for the undeception, and to thank Don Jaime, who, putting those plants aside, has stirred up the vipers in their nests, and has made me see and feel

them that I may endeavour to tear them from my breast, although in order to do so it may be necessary to tear the flesh out with them.

“My God, my God! if Thou dwellest in my soul, if Thou hast not abandoned me, hear my voice and console me and pardon me. Of what value is she, of what value is her beauty, all the freshness of her youth, all the noble pride of her glance, all the harmony of her form, all the grace of her movements, if I can succeed in again turning my thoughts and my will toward Thee, in whom all excellence, all beauty, all grace, are centred and summed up.

“Why didst Thou place this inextinguishable thirst for love in the soul, O my God? Doubtless that it might satiate itself in the divine. But Thou knowest that I sought Thee in the depths of my soul, and if haply I have found Thee, it was surrounded by darkness, vague, undefined, and confused. Thus have I loved Thee above all things. Thus have I clung to Thee closely. I believe I beheld the glory and the splendour of Thy attributes, and I loved Thee and praised Thee. Why, then, didst Thou not manifest to me with clearness Thy beauty in the pure idea in the depths of my thought? Why has this beauty, reflected from Thee, made its dazzling appearance far from Thee and outside of my soul, stirring my being to its depths not in a spiritual and immediate manner, but by means of the gross senses?

"Forgive me, O Lord ! A thousand blasphemies fall from my pen. The unworthy sinner, called upon to give a strict account of his actions, appealing from Thy justice, would cast himself upon Thy clemency. But Thou knowest what I suffer. Thou hast compassion upon me. Thou wilt perhaps pardon me. Formerly Thou didst fill my soul—I beheld her, I was fascinated, and she took Thy place in my soul. Now that she has abandoned me the void, the abyss, the solitude I feel terrify me.

"Impious thoughts come into my mind. I behold clearly the immensity, the Omnipotence of love, sole end of life. Thou Thyself canst be reached only through and by love ; but doubt oppresses my soul and fills it with anguish. I doubt that my finite being can satisfy its love, uniting itself to an infinite being that my mind cannot conceive nor my reason understand. Love aspires to God, but how shall it reach Him ? On the wings of faith I might mount to Thee, but Hope has abandoned me and Faith droops her wings. I ceased to aspire to Thee. I desired to mingle my soul with her soul in order that, thus united, our souls might seek Thee ; and she has abandoned me. My soul dwells alone in the tenebrous regions of space—in the cold and fathomless void—without a star to give it light or heat, far from every sun, further still from Thy dwelling-place. My God ! my God ! what is to become of my soul ?

"In my affection for this woman there was a serenity and a purity that deceived me. I pictured her to myself ethereal, phantasmal, impalpable as the angels may be, unattainable during this mortal life as heaven. Now, when I think that a mortal possesses the treasure of her love, I seek in vain to shut from my vision the images that my fancy conjures up. Formerly I thought I admired her as one admires a work of art, disinterestedly, asking nothing from it, itself its own aim and end. And now I see that her beauty is not the cold beauty of a statue, but that it trembles and glows, animated by the breath of love.

"My God! my God! what a tempest of evil passions sweeps through my soul! Why dost Thou not end at once my shameful and wretched existence? Yes, death! death! before her marriage day arrives!"

The author who writes with calm and critical spirit strives to put, and, when he has genius, succeeds in putting the best there is in his soul into his work.

There he sees his inner self reflected, and he takes delight in contemplating its beauty. The writer who is possessed by his feelings, on the contrary, seeks relief in writing, as if he thus sought to cast from him the poison that is consuming him and destroying him.

Father Enrique, writing with this purpose, now transferred to the paper, with the disorder we have seen, his darkest and most bitter thoughts.

When he had finished, by a violent effort of the will he succeeded in regaining comparative calmness, at least outwardly.

On the wall of his apartment was suspended an ebony crucifix with the image of the Christ carved in ivory, and, kneeling before it, he prayed and asked pardon for his sins and for the blasphemies and evil thoughts he had just written down in order to deliver his soul from them and cast them from his thoughts, if this were possible. The priest asked a miracle from God—that he might forget her and cease to love her, that God might ordain that he should believe it was not Doña Luz he had loved, but a phantom bearing the likeness of Doña Luz, whose shadowy form was impalpable to mortal touch, whose heart thrilled in response to no human affection, whose lips breathed response to no earthly vows, whose feet, in a word, did not rest upon this lower sphere.

Be their cause what it might, whether despair, knowing the miracle he asked to be impossible, or that his pious fervour had softened his anguish, two tears rolled slowly down his emaciated cheeks.

Then, calling to his aid his habitual power of self-control and ashamed of a weakness which offended his sense of his personal dignity, the priest succeeded at last in regaining his composure, and his countenance once more assumed its accustomed serenity of expression, and he re-

solved that he would strive to maintain this composure and to appear calm and impassive until the very instant in which Doña Luz and Don Jaime should plight their troth at the altar and receive the nuptial benediction.

Placing the confession which he had written within the leaves of the manuscript of the new apology, the priest locked them both in the drawer of his writing desk.

XVII

THE WEDDING

MEANTIME Don Jaime's present to the bride—an elegant gown and a costly set of diamonds consisting of a necklace, brooch, and earrings—had arrived from Madrid. Doña Luz could not help reproving him for what she called his reckless extravagance. She felt remorse at being the cause of such ruinous expense, but her remorse was mingled with an infinite tenderness at this proof of his love. The severe reproaches which her good judgment dictated left her lips neutralised by the sweetness with which they were uttered, and finally not only lost all their severity, but were converted into passionate expressions of gratitude by the loving glances which accompanied them.

Doña Luz was very far from being vain, and still farther from being covetous. Mercenary considerations had no weight with her; she was not dazzled by the gleam of gold or precious stones. What captivated her was the very folly of which

Don Jaime had been guilty for her sake and his generosity and unselfishness in making her a gift so large in comparison with his means.

Don Jaime's gifts, then, if Doña Luz had not been already so deeply in love, would have completed the work of captivating her heart.

Doña Luz, who thought she possessed a special gift for reading character, had early decided in her own mind that Don Jaime was frank and generous. His gifts confirmed her in this good opinion.

Don Acisclo, always cautious and prudent, when he learned that Doña Luz contemplated marrying, although he had positive knowledge concerning Don Jaime's fortune, suggested to her the propriety of making inquiries with regard to his character.

Doña Luz answered that she considered such a suggestion as an indignity offered to herself, that her love for Don Jaime was the best guarantee of the worth of Don Jaime, that if she entertained any doubts regarding him she would not love him, and that since she loved him she could not doubt him without offence to herself.

Don Acisclo listened to these and other arguments of the same nature, all which appeared to him absurd and nonsensical, without regarding them in the least, and wrote for information to various persons who were familiar with all that was going on in Madrid. These persons answered with one accord that Don Jaime was a man of excellent character, sound common sense, and

amiable disposition, and, as far as they knew, without a single vice.

Don Acisclo communicated the result of his investigation to Doña Luz, informing her with great satisfaction that, according to the information he had received, Don Jaime fell little short of being a pattern of all the virtues.

At last the day fixed for the wedding arrived and the marriage was celebrated very quietly. Don Miguel, the parish priest, performed the ceremony. The only persons present were Don Anselmo, Pepe Güeto and his wife, Don Acisclo and two of his sons, an intimate friend of Don Jaime who had come from Madrid for the purpose (a colonel of cavalry named Don Antonio Miranda), and the servants of Don Acisclo.

Don Enrique also was a witness of the marriage. His force of will triumphed over every obstacle. He was impassive. No one could have imagined that this calm and cheerful wedding guest was the same man who had written a few days before the passionate words we have read.

Father Enrique forgot nothing. He congratulated Doña Luz with his usual affectionate manner and Don Jaime with the most amiable cordiality. Nor did he wish to be behind Pepe Güeto and Doña Manolita by neglecting to give a wedding present. His means were not sufficient to buy jewels, and he possessed none ; but he had brought with him from his travels, besides the gifts he had made Don Acisclo after his return from the Philip-

pine Islands, various Japanese, Chinese, and Indian weapons with which could be formed a fine panoply, and a curious bronze idol representing the god Siva. This was the present Father Enrique gave Don Jaime to adorn his study.

Father Enrique had taken up his quarters in his uncle's house on the day before the marriage, leaving at the disposal of Doña Luz her own house where, immediately after this event, the newly married pair went to reside.

The honeymoon of Doña Luz was no less sweet and was much more romantic than had been that of her friend, Doña Manolita. Daily intercourse with Don Jaime, far from lessening her esteem for him, augmented it continually, and Doña Luz each day discovered, or thought she discovered, in her husband new graces of intellect and character.

Whether it be due to nature or to education the fact remains the same that while, as a general rule, it displeases a man to learn that his wife or his sweetheart has had a former lover, it pleases a woman and increases her affection for him to know that her husband has had some former love affair. And this no matter how modest or how jealously inclined she may be. The qualities that do most honour to a woman are modesty and decorum, those that do most honour to a man, intelligence and courage. Hence it results that even the most pious and modest young girl far from being displeased with her future husband if she chances to discover that he has been "for-

tunate" with the fair sex, will love him for this more exclusively and passionately than ever. She sees in this "good fortune" a proof of the merit of the man who has been thus favoured by other women; the value of his affection for herself is thereby enhanced, since he has preferred her to so many others whose affection he might have won or has won; and it almost seems as if there was conferred upon her a high moral mission, flattering alike to her vanity and her piety, namely, to render her lover—by virtue of her superior and purer attractions—constant to one object, and to convert him from a gay gallant, dangerous to the peace of her sex, into an inoffensive, tranquil, and sensible head of a family.

Politeness, the laws of decorum—what the French call *les convenances sociales*—do not admit of a gallant boasting of his conquests before the woman he is paying his addresses to, or whose heart he has already won; but these conquests, if revealed to her by any other than himself, contribute singularly to augment her love for him. To have been fortunate in love is and always has been one of the most powerful means at a man's disposal of winning the love of other women. And this from the heroic and primitive ages down to our own times.

When these *convenances sociales* did not forbid it, gallants always found the recital of their fortunate love affairs a powerful aid in subduing and captivating hearts. Homer, who knew or divined

everything, relates that Jupiter being on Gargarus, the highest point of Mount Ida, was visited by Juno, who wore hidden under her robe the girdle of Venus, in which were concealed all the spells of love that deprive the most cautious and sensible men of their prudence. Jupiter, then, when he saw Juno, allowed himself to be vanquished by the power of those spells, and in urging his suit upon her he could find no better means of inducing her to listen than by telling her of his gallant adventures, assuring her that never—either by Danæe, or Leda, or Europa, or any other of the princesses and nymphs whom he had captivated—had he been so powerfully *affected*, if I may use the expression, as on the present occasion. Nothing, in fact, could flatter Juno more greatly than that Jupiter should tell her that she had more power than any of her rivals to *affect* him.

Something of this, for the human heart is always the same, took place in the heart of Doña Luz, without any need for Don Jaime to imitate the discreditable example of the son of Saturn by relating his past conquests.

Doña Luz knew that Don Jaime had been adored in Madrid, and seeing him now so enamoured, so devoted, so humble, her heart swelled with pride and joy at the conviction that she was loved a thousand times more dearly than any of her former rivals had been. In order to complete her satisfaction, Doña Luz made, besides, a critical distinction in the matter, a distinction

which women of her class and character seldom fail to make. The love of Don Jaime for other women had been founded on some ephemeral grace or charm of person or manner, the love he bore her was founded on the enduring qualities of the mind and heart ; his love for other women had sprung from caprice, from vanity, from youthful excitement, his love for her had its source in the purest and deepest feelings of the soul, and with its beneficent current would wash from his heart all trace and stain of every past error, leaving it bright as burnished gold. All this purification and sanctification was the little less than miraculous and superhuman work of the love of Doña Luz and the purifying fire of her eyes.

There is scarcely any woman—no matter how candid she may be—who will dare to confess what is here stated to be applicable in her own case, but most women, when they find themselves in the position of Doña Luz, reason and feel in this way and are firmly convinced that they are in the right, although through fear of the ridicule of the incredulous or the malevolent they may not choose to confess it.

Doña Luz was intoxicated with happiness. Her Don Jaime seemed to her a god, but a god who adored her and who would always be her slave.

From this it resulted that Doña Luz annihilated her own will, merging it, as it were, in the

will of Don Jaime, and yielding her own wishes to his in everything.

Doña Luz gave up her wish to remain in Villafria and consented to accompany her husband to Madrid.

Flattered, and at the same time shamed, by the rich gifts he had bestowed upon her, she wished in her turn to bestow a gift upon him, and presented him with 30,000 reals which she had economised from her income, notwithstanding the large sums she expended in alms and in other works of charity. Of these 30,000 reals which Don Jaime, notwithstanding his reluctance, was at last obliged to accept in order not to offend her, Doña Luz desired that a part should be spent in furnishing the house, and that with the remainder Don Jaime should obtain her title of marchioness. What she had never desired while she was unmarried she desired now so that her husband might be a marquis, as if in thus stamping him, as it were, with her own title and seal she made him more completely her own.

Don Jaime, who up to the time of his marriage had lived modestly in Madrid, did not wish at first to take his wife to a hotel or subject her to discomfort, and it was therefore agreed between himself and Doña Luz that he should go alone to Madrid—whither, besides, his duties in the Congress urgently called him—furnish a house there modestly, as Doña Luz prudently advised, and as

soon as it should be ready for her reception return for her to Villafria.

This was the plan of Doña Luz rather than of Don Jaime. It grieved her to be separated from her husband even for so short a time, but there was a singular charm for her in the thought that Don Jaime himself should prepare, according to his own taste, the house in which he was to receive her, and where she proposed to live simply, participating rarely in the gaieties or amusements of the capital, in order that she might not be burdensome to her husband. And she was no less charmed by the thought—not on her own account, for on this point she had no vanity, but on Don Jaime's—that when she arrived in Madrid her title should be already obtained, and that she should have the right to call herself marchioness.

In brief, twelve days after their marriage—days during which Doña Luz, oblivious to all her surroundings, had had eyes and ears only for Don Jaime—the latter showing plainly his own emotion while he sought to soothe the grief of his bride, who lavished caresses upon him, set out for Madrid, leaving her alone in the ancient and noble mansion whither, as I have said, she had caused to be removed all the furniture, ornaments, and books that adorned the apartment she had occupied in Don Acisclo's house previous to her marriage.

XVIII

A GLORIOUS TRANSLATION

THE departure of Don Jaime, who was to be absent for a month, left Doña Luz in a somewhat melancholy frame of mind, though her melancholy had in it an admixture of sweetness, but also with greater freedom and tranquillity of spirit to enjoy the society of her friends in the intervals during which she was not occupied in thinking over her absent lord.

Doña Luz had been living in a state of ecstasy, as it were, and she had now come back to real life, and while her mind was filled with the thought of her own happiness, which was an ever-present joy, she also felt the need, as is generally the case with those who think themselves happy, of communicating her happiness to others, and the desire to be amiable toward every one, as if she wished to purchase in this way forgiveness for the bliss she enjoyed—a bliss so rare on this earth that it always seems as if it were enjoyed at another's cost.

The reunions which had taken place at Don Acisclo's, then, were resumed, taking place now in the house of Doña Luz.

The same persons as before—that is to say, Don Acisclo, Don Anselmo, Don Miguel, Pepe Güeto and his wife, and Father Enrique—were present every evening.

The same animation as had prevailed in them before again characterised their meetings. Don Anselmo, with the same warmth as before, again expounded his positivist doctrines, and Father Enrique, yielding to the entreaties of Doña Luz and her friend, again combated them with his accustomed sweetness, gentleness, and deliberation.

Father Enrique was neither paler nor more emaciated nor more dejected than he had been previous to the marriage. No change was perceptible in his voice, there was no indication of suffering or of self-repression in his gestures or his looks. Doña Luz would steal furtive and uneasy glances at the priest, scanning his countenance closely when she could do so unobserved, but as she saw there no trace of the hidden passion which she had sometimes attributed to him in her thoughts, she cast all suspicion from her mind, with a sense of satisfaction and relief, though not, it must be confessed, without a secret pang of wounded vanity. Doña Luz sought, as it were, to deafen the ears of her soul, which at times, however, could hear a low and piercing voice upbraiding her, saying :

"Can it be possible that you have been so vain as to imagine that this holy servant of the Lord loved you? Is it not absurd that your vanity should have caused you to torment yourself, estimating the extent of the unconscious evil which you imagined you had wrought? Do you not fear that the devil will fling his jeers at you, that God Himself, if God be capable of such a feeling, will mock you when they look into the depths of your consciousness and see how the foolish fancy flattered while it terrified you that love for you and jealousy of a favoured rival could cause the death of this poor friar? See how unmoved he is; undeceive yourself, his thoughts are occupied with his devotions, with his books, with his studies, with his writings, and it matters nothing to him whether you are married or not. A fine castle in the air was this which your pride constructed! An absurd legend of romantic and hopeless love was this which your imagination created!"

When Doña Luz listened to this malicious voice, which was doubtless the voice of the evil one, she feared that she regretted that the love and the jealousy and the despair of Father Enrique had been only imaginary.

Fortunately, Doña Luz was not only a good woman, but she had also a strong and determined will, and she quickly silenced this voice and calmed the agitation and the tumult which it had excited in her breast.

The most rational and wisest course to pursue was to take it for granted that the priest had never thought of her otherwise than as a dear and esteemed friend, and that in her heart she ought to rejoice at this, and that she did rejoice at it.

Doña Luz then resolved that in her intercourse with the priest there should be no apparent change. Any such change would seem, she thought, like a confession that there had been between them formerly some illicit feeling, a feeling which she had extirpated from her soul and which, if it still existed in the priest's soul, was yet more reprehensible than it had been in hers. •

This thought exercised so powerful an influence over Doña Luz that she now gave greater proofs than ever of her affection and predilection for Father Enrique. She took his hand in hers; she glanced at him with ineffable tenderness; she smiled at him enraptured; she applauded all his words as little less than divine; and she sought opportunities of conversing with him, and manifested plainly the delight she took in his conversation.

The priest had the rare and fatal gift of reading the human heart, and he read that of Doña Luz, and, warned by his former error, knew well how little value was to be attached to all these demonstrations of tenderness. But the sweetness of these demonstrations, no less than the thought of his own unconquerable and unrequited passion, rent his soul with anguish.

Who shall say whether this proceeded from pride or from Christian virtue, or from both together, seeing that in the human soul good and evil instincts are at times combined and good and evil spirits struggle for the mastery impelled by opposite motives, yet both conspiring to the same end? What is certain is that by no complaint, no sigh, no glance, no word, however closely they might be analysed, did Father Enrique reveal, or give the slightest cause to Doña Luz in her eager questioning to suspect the tempest that raged unseen in his soul.

To give up attending their reunions as he had been in the habit of doing, to leave the town, whether to return to the Philippine Islands or to go elsewhere, the moment Doña Luz was married, seemed to the priest miserable weakness and equivalent to a public avowal of his criminal passion. He fancied that by withdrawing from her society or leaving Villafria he should give cause for gossip, arousing a suspicion that perhaps no one had hitherto entertained. The priest was ashamed that any one, while he lived, should divine his profane love, but of no one was he more ashamed than of Doña Luz.

"Let me die, O my God, let me die," he exclaimed, "before she knows that I have loved her, that I love her still!"

To prevent her suspecting this the priest now entered on a terrible struggle with himself. To conquer in this struggle needed greater heroism

than that of the Spartan boy who, without uttering a groan, allowed his flesh to be torn by the claws of the wild animal. Father Enrique resolved within himself to show neither disappointment nor envy nor jealousy nor love, but to continue to show Doña Luz the same sincere and constant friendship as he had always shown her. And he succeeded so well that Doña Luz finally cast from her mind all suspicion that the priest had ever loved her. She deemed him dead to every affection which had its origin in the senses; she believed him inaccessible to every feeling that does not come to the soul directly from God. And in this way without offence to her vanity she arrived at the conclusion that Father Enrique had never loved her.

Doña Luz felt, too, that she had offended the priest in her thoughts by the supposition that he loved her. And therefore, by way of satisfaction for this offence, as well as because the admiration with which his superiority to human weakness inspired her, and her conviction—a conviction that grew stronger every day—that do what she would there was not the slightest danger of Father Enrique's falling in love with her, she yielded to her inclinations and lavished attentions upon him, giving him the most flattering proofs of her friendship.

The spirit is strong and can endure all things, but the flesh is weak, and the spirit which, imprisoned in the flesh, attempts a task beyond the

power of humanity, superior to the strength of the body, ends by destroying the body.

In his youthful days, when he was strong and vigorous, the priest had performed notable works of penance and had treated his poor body with harshness, and even cruelty; later, fatigued and worn out by his labours, he had yielded to the counsels and commands of his physicians and confessors' and had cared for his health and ceased to abuse his strength. The idea that the excesses of an ascetic life were a species of slow and painful suicide, and that to deform and destroy in the body the most beautiful work of the Almighty, the form and the being in which the soul clothes itself while on the earth, and which the Holy Scriptures themselves call the temple of the Holy Spirit, presented itself to his mind and induced him to desist from the mortifications of the flesh.

From this time forward the priest cared for his body as a slave cares for some precious object, some delicate machine confided to him by his master in order that by its use he may make the estate prosper. Whatever there might be of pride in this way of thinking the priest got rid of by conceding in his thoughts that God had no need of him, as himself, that his life was of no more value than the life of any other man whatsoever, but that God had created this life for some special purpose, and not in order that he might destroy it, since to destroy it would be to infringe a divine

law, to disturb or desire to disturb the universal harmony and withdraw by violence a living force from the point of action marked out for it by nature.

Yielding to all these considerations, Father Enrique cared for his health, observing a prudent and regular mode of life.

For a long time past he had ceased to torture his body by fasting, by wearing a haircloth shirt, or by prolonged vigils, but in this mysterious combat in which he had engaged in the silence and dissimulation of his soul, in this apparent impassibility he had assumed, in this tyrannical dominion which his tortured spirit wished to impose and did impose on the body, betraying his anguish neither by groans nor tears, nor even by a contraction of the muscles of his countenance, the priest contrived—perhaps without intending it—the most cruel of martyrdoms, a veritable vengeance, a severe punishment for his fault, if fault there were.

The athlete in the midst of the most violent exercises, the warrior while engaged in the fiercest combat, sustained by their ardour and by nervous excitement, feel neither weariness nor exhaustion. Exhaustion does not come until after the triumph. The soldier who fought at Marathon did not fall dead until he had given the Athenians the news of the victory. In the same way Father Enrique played his part to perfection while he was in the presence of Doña Luz, or of any other person.

But in the seclusion of his own room, as if the springs which held his nerves in constant tension were then loosened, he would fall into a state of utter prostration, half-stifled sighs would break from his oppressed heart, vertigo would seize him, his sight would grow clouded, his fingers grow numb, or they would turn suddenly cold or be seized by cramps ; images and ideas would crowd confusedly to his mind ; his head would ache, and he would even hesitate and stammer in his speech when addressing Ramon, his servant.

Father Enrique suffered repeated attacks of this kind, always in the solitude of his own room. The priest had some knowledge of medicine and treated himself on these occasions, directing his servant to apply mustard plasters or to use powerful friction. At other times he would inhale the pungent odour of a certain herb which had the property of provoking a slight bleeding of the nose, or he would wrap his head in a cloth wet with cold water.

On recovering from one of these attacks he never failed to say to Ramon :

"This is of no consequence, say nothing about it to any one."

And the servant would answer, "Very well, master."

This being the condition of affairs, on the morning of the tenth day after the departure of Don Jaime, Father Enrique suffered a more serious attack than any of the previous ones.

The priest, as Ramon afterward related, had spent the night in a state of extreme agitation. The servant, hearing him pacing rapidly up and down the floor, had gone to his master's room on tiptoe, fearing to annoy him by seeming to spy upon his actions, and had seen him writing. Later on he had again heard him walking up and down the room. The priest at last fell into a sleep, but a sleep which alarmed his faithful servant—a troubled sleep accompanied by a hoarse and stertorous breathing. His features were distorted, he had dark circles under his eyes, and he was even paler than usual. Notwithstanding these alarming symptoms, such was the respect in which Ramon held his master's orders that he did not dare either to call the physician, or to awaken the priest.

The latter awoke of his own accord, but his awakening was terrible to behold. The muscles of his countenance were immovable, his tongue was paralysed and unable to utter a sound, his gaze wandered, his extremities were cold and rigid as marble.

Ramon, filled with consternation and grief, called Don Acisclo to his nephew's assistance, and then ran for Don Anselmo.

Don Anselmo came at once, and as soon as he had looked at the sick man it was evident from the expression of his countenance that he considered his condition almost hopeless.

"Speak frankly, Don Anselmo," said Don

Acisclo. "What is the matter with my nephew?"

"His condition is very serious," answered the doctor gravely.

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Don Acisclo. "Who could have anticipated this when only yesterday he was perfectly well?"

"You did not anticipate it because you did not know the secret malady that was killing him. Your nephew is a patient man, and accustomed to conceal his ills. Would to heaven he had been less so, and we might have come to his assistance in time!"

"What! do you mean to say that it is too late to save him?"

"Don Acisclo, you love your nephew with your whole heart, but you are courageous and strong minded. Why try to deceive you? It is better that you should know the real state of the case. Father Enrique is in the utmost danger."

"What is his malady?"

"A malady much rarer, and consequently much more dangerous, in the frail and delicate than in the strong and robust. Prolonged intellectual labour, intense grief, protracted vigils, suppressed mental excitement, repressed emotion, working mysteriously in our organism, are, it may be, the causes of these sudden attacks; the heart swells, acquires a morbid and irregular force, and suddenly suffuses the brain with blood."

"What do you mean by all this?"

"I mean that your nephew has had a stroke of apoplexy."

Don Acisclo, who loved his nephew, and considered him as, next to himself, the chief glory of his family, was filled with deep and sincere grief at this intelligence, and tried by his entreaties and lamentations to stimulate the doctor's zeal.

The latter had no need of any such stimulus however. He wished to restore the priest to health, but he knew that his condition was desperate, that only a miracle could save his life, and he had no belief in miracles. Meantime he did all in his power, humanly speaking, to save him. He did not wish to bleed the sick man, for he thought him too weak, but he gave him the most powerful of the remedies usual in such cases.

In order to prevent or, if it already existed, to subdue cerebral inflammation, he applied a blister to the back of the neck and made use of counter-irritants to draw the blood from the brain to the extremities. All was in vain, however.

The news of the priest's illness spread rapidly throughout the town, and soon reached the ears of Doña Luz, who went at once to see him.

Who can say what strange and sorrowful thoughts assailed the mind of Doña Luz when she entered the room in which the priest lay ill—the room which she herself had occupied for more than twelve years.

Silently and gravely she approached the bedside. There before her, his head supported by

pillows, the priest lay apparently unconscious—his eyes dull and expressionless, his eyelids half closed, his lips mute. Perhaps sensation had not yet left him, perhaps he saw and understood what was taking place around him, but from want of muscular power he had no means of making known his impressions.

Doña Luz gazed long at the priest without uttering a word. At last she burst into bitter weeping. Presently she sat down in a chair in the darkest corner of the room and let her tears flow in silence, not wishing to attract attention to her presence in the room.

In the hurry and excitement of the occasion Doña Luz and the sick man were left alone together for a few moments.

She rose from her chair, approached the bedside, and, spell-bound as it were, gazed long and fixedly at the priest, as the traveller standing on the edge of a precipice looks with fascinated gaze into the dark and mysterious depths of the abyss below.

Her tears then flowed more abundantly than before. She was more strongly impressed than she had ever been before with the resemblance between the man before her and the dead Christ of her picture; she either imagined or it was in reality the case that the priest, motionless as he was, could yet feel and understand what was taking place around him, and that he looked at her, making an effort, even now, to command the inert

nerves and muscles which no longer obeyed his will. She fancied that the glance of the sick man was by turns supplicating, tender, and melancholy. Impelled irresistibly, moved to the depths of her soul, almost unconscious of her act, without reflecting, without hesitating, as an irresponsible force acts without reflecting or hesitating, Doña Luz gently bent her face toward that of the priest and pressed her lips on his emaciated⁴ brow and then on his half-closed eyelids and then on his lips, already rigid, fervently, piously, as one might kiss the relics of a saint.

Doña Luz could no longer support her anguish. She uttered a sharp cry and fell senseless on the floor. The priest remained motionless as before.

Don Anselmo, Don Acisclo, and Ramon shortly afterward entered the room.

"How wrong," said Don Anselmo, "to have left this lady here alone! She is very excitable; it is not fit that she should be here. Besides, the patient needs quiet."

Doña Luz soon came to herself, and, in accordance with the wish expressed in Don Anselmo's last words, which she had heard and understood, left the room.

Few, indeed, are those who are long remembered after their death. Time consoles the grief their loss has occasioned; the body mingles with the earth, oblivion at last swallows up every memory. But for every one—or almost every one—there comes, immediately after death, a

period during which he is regarded by the world with indulgence, affection, and esteem. Those who thought him too insignificant to notice while living give him a place in their thoughts now that he is dead, for in dying he has performed the act most worthy of commemoration of his life—he has *realised his essence*, as the philosophers in fashion express it; those who envied him forget their envy, those who hated him their hatred; those who were tired of seeing him are secretly rejoiced that they shall see him no more, and to make amends to him for this feeling, and so that his ghost may not come at night to haunt them, they sound his praises without ceasing. All his faults disappear for a time as if the grave had swallowed them up, and only his virtues are remembered; in short, in dying, he has made his peace with almost all mankind, for the very reason that he has died and left something to inherit, if not country-seats or palaces, a place in the sunshine to beg.

Be the reason what it might, after the death of the priest, whose existence—with the exception of Don Acisclo and his friends—every one in Villafria had by this time almost forgotten, there was a general revival in the town of affection and enthusiasm for him. They all united in admiring and praising him even more ardently than they had done on the day of his arrival. For the very reason that they had seen so little of him they could give free rein to their imagination. They

extolled his virtues. They brought to light many works of mercy which he had performed. They adorned the simple story of his death with a thousand details which bordered on the marvellous. There were pious women who averred that the priest himself had foretold with exactness the day and hour of his glorious passage to a better life, and it was the conviction of not a few that he had died in the odour of sanctity, and that Don Acisclo should endeavour to have him canonised, sending a statement of the facts, duly substantiated, to Rome, for that purpose.

Some incredulous persons of the place would have it thought that all these eulogies had for their purpose to flatter Don Acisclo, who mourned for his nephew sincerely, and sounded his praises in every possible key.

At all events, credulous and incredulous, whether for the purpose of paying court to Don Acisclo or because such was really their opinion, the Villafrians agreed in saying that the deceased had been an estimable man, full of wisdom and goodness, and even of holiness, each one giving his own interpretation to the word holiness.

But no one mourned him more tenderly or more sincerely than the one who had, or thought she had, reason to believe that he had not been altogether holy. Doña Luz, during the days immediately following Father Enrique's death, was inconsolable.

Strange thoughts came to her mind to augment

her suffering. On the one hand a certain sentiment of pride when she again returned to the belief that she had inspired him with a fatal passion, and the horror with which this pride filled her ; on the other, the confused suspicion, accompanied by a vague remorse, that by an abominable, although involuntary impulse, she had awakened this passion in a soul before tranquil and happy ; and, finally, the doubt whether all this were not the creation of her own vanity. Might it not be all only a romantic fancy of her own ? What had the priest ever said to her that she should suppose him in love with her ? She it was who was romantic and sentimental in having insanely kissed him in his last hour.

“What if it be I who have been wicked, senseless, mad ?” she said to herself. “What if it be I who loved him while he regarded me only with the innocent and tranquil affection of a father ?”

At this thought Doña Luz was filled with shame. She trembled like a leaf, bitterly reproaching herself for her folly and regarding herself as even false to her wifely vows.

While these thoughts were passing through the mind of Doña Luz, Don Acisclo distributed among the members of the family the few and unimportant possessions of the priest—possessions which were precious rather for the memories attached to them than for their intrinsic value.

In making this distribution Don Acisclo set apart for Doña Luz the few books owned by Father Enrique.

Don Acisclo was not ignorant of the fact that the priest was writing a book, and he even thought of having it printed himself, although it had been left unfinished.

He accordingly made a search for the manuscript, which he found, and, reflecting that the only two persons in the town capable of understanding what he called *gibberish* were Don Anselmo and Doña Luz, and that Don Anselmo, being an infidel, would appreciate this *gibberish* less than Doña Luz, who was a believer, he did not hesitate to take the manuscript to Doña Luz, without even opening it, for all that was writing, unless it might be an account, in which the balance was in his favour, puzzled Don Acisclo.

Doña Luz received the manuscript with a feeling of veneration, and as soon as Don Acisclo had retired opened it with anxious curiosity and began to read it. In her impatience she turned over its pages rapidly and eagerly, taking in the meaning at a glance, in order to gain a general idea of its contents, leaving a more careful perusal for a future time.

After turning over a few pages she came across the loose sheets of manuscript. Her gaze was fascinated by them. Her heart told her that they contained matter of deep interest.

She read them through slowly, with frequent

interruptions, for the tears blinded her eyes and prevented her seeing the letters clearly.

At each of these enforced interruptions Doña Luz would exclaim in a low voice, as if she feared to be overheard, her words broken by sighs :

“It was true! It was true! He loved me, my God! How dearly he loved me!

In addition to what we already know, Father Enrique had written, on the day preceding his death, the following words, which Doña Luz now read :

“These pages, if I do not destroy them, will inevitably fall after my death into her beautiful hands. I shall not then be ashamed of her knowing that I loved her. Forgive me this new crime, O my God! I desire that she should know it. How could this knowledge disturb the happiness and peace of her noble life? She has loved me, she loves me as an angel loves a saint, while I have loved her as a man loves a woman. I should be a hypocrite if I did not reveal to her the fact that I am unworthy of her angelic love—that I loved her with a sinful love. It is necessary for my eternal repose that she should pardon me for having converted balm into poison and her innocent affection into a temptation ; for having fed with the pure light of her eyes this hell-fire that devours me and stains the purity of her image which I bear engraven on my soul. In despite of Thee, O my God! in despite of Thee and in opposition to Thee, I bear it engraven there indelibly.

All the force of my will, all the power of heaven, all the torments of hell cannot tear it thence. Doña Luz and my love for Doña Luz live with an immortal life in my soul."

When she had finished reading the manuscript the grief of Doña Luz broke forth afresh ; tears flowed more abundantly than ever from her eyes ; sobs choked her breast, but as the rainbow shines among the storm clouds, a sweet smile of triumph and gratitude for this love, which asked only for pardon, shone on her fresh and rosy lips.

.XIX

DON GREGORIO'S MISSION

THE sorrow of Doña Luz, when some days had passed, had more of sweetness in it than of bitterness. Although it did not cease to be sorrow, there was mingled with it a feeling of contentment caused by having inspired so lively a sympathy, by the declaration of the priest himself that she had used no arts to allure him, and by the absolution which she bestowed upon herself after a rigorous examination of her conscience.

Doña Luz was not to blame for the love for which she was grateful, nor for the death she mourned. The friendship, the admiration, and the veneration she cherished for Father Enrique were as strong as it was possible for them to be. If the feeling she had cherished for him had been stronger she would have sinned against God, against her honour, and against her decorum.

On the other hand, her love for Don Jaime was legitimate, correct, in consonance with her rank and position, and, lastly, founded on reasons no less

romantic than those on which the love she might love entertained for Father Enrique, if such a love had been lawful, would have been founded.

In order to strengthen and magnify the romantic reasons for the love she bore Don Jaime, Doña Luz exaggerated Don Jaime's love for herself. His disinterestedness was evident. He could have made his choice among the noblest ladies of Madrid. He could easily have won—had he so desired—a wife with a title and an income. Don Jaime had, beyond a doubt, disdained, for her sake, the most brilliant matches. Don Jaime consequently adored her. And Don Jaime, accomplished as he was, of noble lineage, with a brilliant future before him, honoured and esteemed already as an able commander and a brave soldier, might give just cause for pride to the woman on whom he had bestowed his name. Don Jaime, besides, was still young, was handsome, graceful, intelligent, and agreeable. The letters he wrote to Doña Luz from Madrid gave proof of his love by their tenderness and affection, and of his intelligence and his wit by the excellence of their style and by the anecdotes and epigrams of which they were full.

Doña Luz, then, in view of all this, decided in her own mind that she was deeply in love with her husband, that she had good reasons for being so, and for having married him, and that the tender friendship she had entertained for Father Enrique, the tears she had shed for his death, and even the

kisses she had given him, were inspired by so different a feeling that they were in no wise opposed to, nor did they alter or modify in the remotest degree, nor loosen in the slightest the bonds of love and marriage that united her to Don Jaime.

In a few days Don Jaime would return. He had already taken a suitable house, which was now nearly furnished. He had already obtained the title. Don Jaime and Doña Luz might now call themselves the Marquis and Marchioness of Villafria. Don Jaime was to arrive within the week, and it was now Wednesday.

Doña Luz was in her room. She had just returned from church, where she had prayed fervently for the soul of Father Enrique, on whom she allowed her thoughts to dwell constantly with tender melancholy, when Juana, her servant, entered and said :

"Señora, a stranger wishes to see you."

"What is his name?"

"Don Gregorio Salinas."

"I do not know him. What is he like?"

"He looks like a gentleman. He is well dressed, although in travelling attire. It can be seen that he has just come from a journey. He is short, stout, red as a beet, and he wears a smiling and contented look, although he is in mourning."

"Look, Juana, I have no wish to see visitors. Tell him that I have an headache—to return some

other time if he has anything of importance to say to me—that I am not receiving to-day.”

Juana left the room to give the stranger her mistress's message, and returned a few moments afterward with a letter, which she handed to Doña Luz.

“Don Gregorio Salinas,” said Juana, “desires me to give you this letter, and says that you will see him as soon as you have read it. He says the letter will serve as his credentials.”

When Doña Luz took the letter and saw the superscription she was filled with amazement. She had recognised her father's handwriting!

She opened it hastily and looked at the signature. It was her father's.

She then read the date and saw that it had been written more than fifteen years before. The letter was short; it contained only these words:

“MY DEAR DAUGHTER,—Don Gregorio Salinas, a notary of Madrid, a man who possesses my fullest confidence, will deliver this letter to you. Place implicit reliance on what he tells you. Follow his counsels and receive, without the slightest scruple, whatever he may offer to deliver to you.”

“Ask the gentleman to come in,” said Doña Luz.

After the usual salutations and when Doña Luz and her hitherto unknown guest were comfortably seated, the latter quietly, and with the air of one who has weighty matters to impart, proceeded to speak as follows:

"You already know that my name is Gregorio Salinas. I am now a notary, and am not ill provided with the gifts of fortune. Twenty-eight years ago I was a student without a *peseta* in my pocket ; but in exchange I was neither stout, nor grey, nor bald, nor wrinkled ; and people used to say, if your ladyship will excuse my vanity in recalling it, that I was a good-looking, sprightly, and agreeable youth. There was nothing strange, therefore, in a woman of the merits of my Joaquina falling in love with me. (Joaquina is my wife, at your ladyship's service.) She has a strong affection for your ladyship, and she has charged me to give you her respectful and affectionate regards."

"Many thanks," returned Doña Luz, interrupting Don Gregorio. "Dispense with ceremony in addressing me, and forgive me if I ask you frankly, in addition, to make your story as short as possible for I am dying with curiosity to hear what you have to tell me."

"Have patience, Señora Marchioness, have patience. I promise you to be neither prolix nor tedious, but to go at once to the point. Do not imagine that anything I shall say is without its purpose ; every word is necessary to your complete understanding of the question."

"Continue, then, and once more forgive me for interrupting you."

"Well, then, as I was about to say," resumed Don Gregorio, "my wife is now a fresh and hand-

some matron, although the years have not passed over her without leaving their traces. She has given me five children, all beautiful as the sun—they are all at your service, Señora Marchioness. At the time I speak of, before our marriage, my Joaquina was one of the handsomest girls to be found in all Madrid, and was in the service of a certain lady of the highest rank whose entire confidence she enjoyed and whose most important secrets she possessed.”

“And what was the name of this lady?”

“The Countess of Fajalauza.”

Doña Luz shrugged her shoulders with indifference, as if she heard the name for the first time, and was silent. Don Gregorio continued:

“Both my wife and myself owe a heavy debt of gratitude to this lady. She it was who brought about our marriage, she bestowed on us her protection and gave us the means of attaining the comfort and prosperity which we now enjoy. May God reward her for it, and increase her glory! She well deserves it, for, after all, if she committed a fault she had her purgatory in the misery she endured in this life. The countess was married to a man with a temper so violent that his equal has never been seen in our day. He made every one tremble before him, beginning with his wife. He had had various affairs of what is called “honour,” and he had the killing of three men on his conscience, and the wounding of several others. He had the reputation of

being so good a shot that he could kill a mosquito on the wing at fifty yards' distance, and so skilful a swordsman that he could run the devil himself through with his sword, if he got into a quarrel with him. Add to this that he was as jealous as a Turk, and this, not because of his excessive love for the countess, but for other reasons. The poor countess had given him no cause for jealousy during eight years of married life. She was, indeed, a very saint for patience, and a devout Christian."

Doña Luz began to give evident signs of interest in the narration. Don Gregorio continued :

"The countess had brought her husband a large fortune. Evil tongues had spread the report that the only motive the count had in marrying her was self-interest. Love had no part in the match, on either side. The countess married her husband when she was little more than a child, yielding to the persuasions of her mother, and ignorant of the importance of the step she was taking. Shortly afterward her mother died, and the orphan, without brothers or sisters or other near relations, found herself alone in the world in the power of a man who might rather be called her tyrant than her husband and companion.

"The countess had no reason whatever either to love or respect her husband ; but she respected her own reputation and she feared God and venerated the precepts of morality and religion.

No fault could be found with her conduct, as I have said, during the first eight years of her married life. She accepted her fate with the resignation of a martyr. She had not even the consolation and the refuge which many other women have of maternal affection. The ill-starred marriage had been a childless one.

"An affair of great importance at this time called the count to Lima. It did not suit his purpose to confide to any one the nature of his business there, in which a more than respectable sum was at stake. The countess was in a delicate state of health and unable to accompany her husband on so long a voyage. The count, after much hesitation, resolved to make the journey alone. This he did, remaining in Peru nearly a year and a half.

"During the absence of the count the countess attended neither parties nor other places of amusement. She led a very retired life, but there were never wanting gallants or admirers to pay their court to her. The countess treated them all alike with indifference, with the exception of one, who was endowed with gifts so rare and brilliant, who loved, or pretended to love her so ardently, who was so clever, so handsome, and so winning, that he succeeded in captivating the heart of the unhappy countess. To this result the reputation for breaking hearts which the gallant already enjoyed contributed in no slight degree. Nothing has so much weight with women in these matters

as the consideration that the man who aspires to their affection has scorned for their sakes other women, admired, young, handsome, rich or distinguished.

"In short, and be the cause what it might, the countess fell in love with the gallant, and such was the ardour of her passion that she allowed it to triumph over her most deeply rooted principles.

"These relations remained wrapped in the profoundest mystery. No one but my Joaquina had any knowledge of them. The countess was a strange woman. Impelled by the irresistible power of her affection she would consent to see her lover, and afterward she would weep and pray and be filled with abhorrence for herself as if she thought herself the vilest of created beings and despaired even of the mercy of God.

"In this state of spiritual conflict, divided between love and repentance, she remained until her husband's return.

"Her secret had been so well guarded that no one even suspected that she had one.

"The count, however, who was suspicious and jealous by nature, had suspected something from the very day of his return. Perhaps his wife's agitation, the manifest repugnance toward him which had taken the place of her former indifference, some chance word, some accusing sigh, sufficed to put him on the scent.

"One night, while the countess was asleep, her husband obtained the key of her writing desk,

and carefully examined its contents. The countess had imprudently preserved the first letters she had received from her lover, and the count read these letters. Fortunately, they contained nothing to criminate the countess. It was even possible to suppose that she had preserved them through vanity and as a proof of the love she had inspired. The letters, however, were motive sufficient for the most terrible scenes between the count and his wife. If the letters had contained a proof of her guilt, the count would have killed her. As it was, he confined himself to torturing her, suspecting her, and watching her. Under a plausible pretext, he brought his sister, an old maid, a very hell-fury, to reside in the house. This woman was thenceforth the spy, the companion, the duenna, the shadow of the countess.

"As for the lover, whose name the count had discovered from the letters, he, too, had to pay dearly for her imprudence. The count sought him out and compelled him to fight a duel with him, without witnesses or any of the other formalities usual in such cases, in order that no one should learn of the duel or inquire into its motive. The lover was left lying dangerously wounded in his own house, and it was only by a miracle of science that his life was saved."

"I was aware of this adventure of my father," said Doña Luz, "but I knew neither the name of his adversary nor the cause of the duel. Continue, Don Gregorio."

"Now that you know that the gallant was the marquis, your father, I shall call him by his name during the remainder of this relation. If any word should escape me calculated to wound, in the slightest degree, the memory of the Señor Marquis, I offer you a million apologies in advance."

Doña Luz signified by a gesture her acceptance of the proffered apologies.

Don Gregorio continued :

"The terror with which her husband inspired her, the vigilance of the Argus in petticoats whom she had at her side in the person of her sister-in-law, and her own remorse, all conspired to prevent the countess again seeing the marquis in secret. The latter, after a time, rooted from his heart an affection so dangerous and so hopeless, and sought consolation from other sources.

"Every link would have been broken and all communication have ceased for ever between the marquis and the countess if Heaven had not ordained that there should remain a living reminder of the love and the sin of both, a being whose existence bound them together and over whose welfare and future fate it was the duty of both to watch."

"And my mother," exclaimed Doña Luz, "never saw me again after her husband's return from Lima?"

"She saw you, but from a distance, without being able to embrace you, kiss you, or speak

to you ; her thoughts, however, were always with you."

"Unhappy mother !"

"The countess heard of you through my Joaquina. Through my Joaquina, too, she communicated with the marquis in every matter concerning you—the only subject on which she and your father now held any communication.

"In my house it was that your ladyship passed the first days of your existence under my Joaquina's care. Our seamstress, one Antonio Gutierrez, who had just lost her own illegitimate child, was your nurse. She herself died not long afterward, and I arranged matters in such a way, with the consent of the countess and of the girl's relations, as that you should pass for her child in order to secure your legal right to the inheritance of the title and the estates of the marquis, your father.

"After the return of the count to Madrid, and especially after the occurrence of the duel, we were all in a state of constant terror lest he should come to know of your existence, and the marquis, as soon as he had recovered from his wound, removed you from our house, to our great grief and to the still greater grief of the countess, and placed you in the house of a lady of somewhat doubtful reputation. During the whole time of your stay in this house the countess was very unhappy. She never rested until, yielding to her earnest entreaties, conveyed to him by

Joaquina, the marquis took you to his own house, where he put you, first under the care of a worthy woman and afterward in charge of an English governess whom the countess had persuaded him to engage.

"The marquis, meanwhile, far from settling down as years went by, paid not the slightest heed to those wise sayings, 'Let him who would be an old man long begin to be an old man early,' and 'An old man with care will reach his hundredth year.' Far from exemplifying in his life the wisdom of those sayings, his conduct served rather to illustrate the truth of that other saying—and forgive me, your ladyship, for making the application, but the story seems almost to cry aloud for it—'The older the tree the tougher the bark.' By this I mean to say that the marquis, instead of reforming with age, led a more disorderly life than ever, which was a source of great mortification to the countess. The passion to which she had sacrificed so much—honour, tranquillity, and happiness—had been for the marquis only an episode, an adventure. This greatly distressed and grieved the countess, but there was something else which distressed her still more, which kept her in a state of continual anxiety, and which, growing daily more serious, became at last a source of unceasing torment for her.

"The marquis was fast hastening to his ruin ; his property was mortgaged to its full value, and

the usurious interest he was obliged to pay consumed the greater part of his income. It was an assured fact that the marquis would end his days in poverty. What was then to become of his daughter, Doña Luz, orphaned, without a protector, and without resources?

"The worse of the matter was that the countess could render no assistance to her daughter while her husband lived. Before the count had begun to suspect his wife she had enjoyed the shadow of independence and liberty. After that the countess was rather a slave than a wife. A loud exclamation, a harsh word, a menacing gesture of her husband's, were sufficient to fill her with terror.

"The count, besides being jealous, was avaricious, and the countess could not dispose of a real without giving a strict account of the manner of its outlay.

"Her imagination, with cruel art, pictured to her in the most vivid colours the misfortune she feared. She fancied she beheld her daughter penniless, enduring every kind of humiliation, engaged in the vilest tasks, while she was rolling in wealth yet unable to offer her any assistance.

"How could she assist her without the count's knowledge? And if the count knew she assisted her he would know also of her crime and her shame; he would appear before her as an angry and inflexible judge, and with one insulting word would kill her.

"The countess, tormented by her conscience and reduced to the lowest depths of misery and humiliation by her terror of the count, longed for death that she might rest, while at the same time she desired to live, and, above all, to outlive her husband.

"While he lived the countess knew that she would never have the courage to take any step in her daughter's favour. Whether as a gift during her life, or as a legacy at her death, she could devise no means by which she could share with the girl who was her own flesh and blood the wealth that was hers, not that of the tyrant who tortured her.

"The countess then submitted herself to the will of the Most High, and waited calmly, and trying not to desire it, for her husband's death to take place before her own. She made a solemn resolution, if this should occur, to leave in her will to her husband's relations everything, both real estate and personal property, in whose acquisition and ownership the most scrupulous conscience could suppose the count to have had any part; to leave large legacies to those persons who had served her faithfully, as my Joaquina, for instance, and the remainder of her fortune, then and still invested in Government bonds in various banks and commercial houses, to her daughter.

"The marquis learned through Joaquina of this resolution of the countess, and when, beset by his creditors, having mortgaged or sold everything he

possessed to satisfy their claims, he determined to retire to this town, he gave me, as a letter of introduction, the letter you have just read. Until the occurrence of the event provided for, the letter was to remain in my possession unknown to everybody else. And so until now it has remained.

"After the death of the marquis there remained but three persons in existence who knew of the intention of the countess to make you her heiress."

"And who were those persons?" asked Doña Luz, with an appearance of the greatest interest.

"The countess herself, my wife, who is discretion personified, and your ladyship's humble servant."

"And no one else?"

"No one else."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I am sure of it."

Don Grégorio then continued his relation in the following words:

"Heaven decreed that the plans, I will not say the wishes, of our benefactress should be fulfilled. The count died a little more than a month and a half ago.* It seems like a miracle that the countess, who was so sickly and so frail, should have survived him. Force of will can accomplish a great deal. It would seem as if the countess had survived her husband only in order to carry out her purpose and then die."

"Is my mother dead?" exclaimed Doña Luz, her eyes full of tears.

"She is dead."

"And without having called me to her side, without having seen me or embraced me!"

"The countess desired to do all this, but at the same time she feared to do it. She was ashamed to call to her side the daughter to whom, in revealing herself to her as her mother she should be obliged to confess her fault and, as she called it, her dishonour. She doubted that a daughter, whom—be the reason what it might—she had not reared, who had never seen her, on whom she had never bestowed a caress, could love her. She did not believe in the mysterious power of nature. In her own case it was different; she knew that her Luz lived because she had been lavishing her love upon her for so many years, but from her Luz, when it should be all at once revealed to her that she had a mother in Madrid, what sudden affection, what tenderness could she expect? So at least thought the countess. And, above all, for the very reason that she loved her daughter, she was ashamed to make herself known to her; the mere thought of doing so made her blush. Fear of scandal, the dread lest her fault should be known, served also as an obstacle to the fulfilment of her desire. And, finally, the countess, shortly after her husband's death, was seized with the illness which was to prove her last, and had barely the necessary time to put her affairs in order and carry out her resolution. She lived for a few weeks longer, but delirium set in and she never

fully recovered consciousness of her surroundings or the memory of past events. At the end of this time she died."

Doña Luz gave free vent to the genuine and profound emotion which these words caused her. Don Gregorio remained silent for a few moments, respecting this tribute of grief paid by a daughter to the memory of the woman to whom (although she had never known her) she owed her existence.

Presently Don Gregorio, speaking now in the cold and formal tones of the man of business, resumed :

"I am, your ladyship, an executor of the will of the deceased and a trustee of the estate, especially charged with your interests. All the necessary formalities have been gone through, for I am not one to go asleep over my business. Everything has been arranged in the manner least likely to give rise to gossip or comment. The legacies have all been paid ; my wife has received a handsome sum ; the relations of the count have received their share of the jewels, money, and real estate. The chief part of the inheritance is now to be delivered. I have in my possession the documents necessary to establish your title as legal heir to the fortune of the countess, invested in Government bonds placed in various banking houses in Paris, London, and Frankfort. I do not remember the exact nominal amount of the whole, but its actual amount is something over the

trifling sum of seventeen million reals. Whenever your ladyship pleases you can take possession of your inheritance, and inform yourself of the precise manner of its investment."

"As you probably already know, Don Gregorio," answered Doña Luz, "I am married. Let us wait for my husband's arrival, then, to take formal possession of the inheritance. He will assume sole and absolute control of everything, with the necessary legal formalities. In three or four days he will be here. Meanwhile this house is large enough to offer you its hospitality."

Don Gregorio accepted the invitation of Doña Luz, by which he felt himself highly honoured, and transferred to a room which she had prepared for him in her ancestral house the valise he had left in the wretched inn of the town.

Doña Luz, meanwhile, although greatly affected by the news of her mother's death and by the melancholy history which she had just heard related, paid tribute to human weakness, and gave way to her joyful emotions at finding herself so rich. But what most delighted her in the thought of all these millions that had dropped down to her from the skies, as it were, was that they were to be a magnificent gift which she would bestow upon her Don Jaime in return for the disinterested love with which he had chosen her to share his fortune and to bear his name.

XX

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

THE arrival of a stranger, especially if this stranger chances to wear a frock coat and a *bee-hive*—that is to say, a hat with a high crown—is always a noteworthy event in every inland town in Andalusia. Public curiosity is excited, and every one asks his neighbour, “What can have brought this stranger here?”

This was the question the Villafrians or Villafriescos asked one another as soon as they saw Don Gregorio. And curiosity increased tenfold when it was known that Don Gregorio had taken up his quarters in the house of Doña Luz.

In addition to curiosity, there are other and nobler sentiments aroused among the inhabitants of small places by the advent of a stranger—sociability and hospitality.

The men of the place hasten to call on the stranger and offer him their services, and this is what the magnates of Villafria did in the case of Don Gregorio.

It is needless to say that a visit, although it may be suggested by courtesy, need not be confined within the limits of mere courtesy. "Courtesy is not incompatible with courage," and, accordingly, the stranger is unhesitatingly asked as many questions as may be necessary in order to discover who he is, what is the object of his visit, and what are his plans.

On the other hand, the stranger, though he should not ask a single question, is put in possession of every detail relating to the affairs of the place, the wealth and prosperity of the inhabitants being exaggerated in the account through a spirit of vanity and boastfulness.

In regard to this latter trait, however, the inhabitants of Villafria had recently received a severe lesson which had been productive of salutary and lasting results.

There had come to the town a certain stranger who had made the acquaintance on the journey of the son of one of the richest farmers of the place, who chanced to be his fellow-traveller. This young man took the stranger to the house of his father, who was more given to boasting of his riches and the ease and comfort in which he lived than any other man in Villafria.

It needed but few questions on the stranger's part to draw from the farmer a detailed account of his wealth, which he made three times greater than it was. He owned a still which had been in operation for eight months, and he told the

stranger that he owned two stills which had been in operation for a year, and which were frequently kept going both night and day. He owned an olive mill with hydraulic pressure, and he told him that he had three mills with hydraulic pressure. His vineyards produced five thousand *arrobas* of wine, and he told him that they produced twelve thousand. He had pressed two thousand bushels of olives, and he assured him that he had pressed over six thousand bushels. The other farmers, not wishing to be thought too greatly behind their fellow-townsmen in wealth, also exaggerated to the stranger the amount of their profits, their harvests, and their industries. The stranger arrived at the conclusion that he had come to a sort of Golconda, and then disclosed the fact that he was a Government inspector, making the tour of the towns and villages of the country for the purpose of finding out if the inhabitants had made false statements regarding the amount of their possessions, with a view to verifying the returns, particularly in relation to the tax on industries.

The panic in Villafria was tremendous. The commissioner declared that he found himself in the harsh necessity of putting in possession of the authorities the information he had acquired concerning the extent of the wealth here concealed; and the largest of the taxpayers, terrified at the consequences should he carry out his intention, assembled at once in the town-hall, and, sending

for the commissioner, entreated him not to ruin them, saying that they were extremely poor, and that three-fifths of what they had told him regarding their possessions was only boasting and lies.

The commissioner answered that there might indeed be something of boastful exaggeration in what they had told him, but that, as a matter of fact, the inhabitants were much more wealthy and trade was much more active in the place than appeared in the official reports, and that, in compliance with his duty, and in order to draw up a correct report, he should be obliged to make a thorough investigation in the matter. The taxpayers begged him not to put himself to all this inconvenience, saying that it would cause him an infinite amount of trouble, and that no one would thank him for it in the end; and finally, to give greater force to their arguments, they made up a purse among them of eight thousand reals, which they gave him to help to pay his expenses and to compensate him for the fatigues of his journey; whereupon, to the satisfaction of every one concerned, he carried his music, or, let us say, his statistics elsewhere.

Since this event the inhabitants of Villafria had ceased to indulge in the vice of boastfulness, cultivating assiduously in its stead the virtue of humility. Frankness and candour they thought qualities equally to be eschewed with boastfulness, and by no means to be employed in the gratifica-

tion of impertinent curiosity, knowing well, as they did, the practical wisdom of the proverb, "If any one seeks to find out your business, mislead him with lies."

From this proceeded the prudent mistrust and the artful dissimulation manifested by the inhabitants of Villafria in their intercourse with strangers—qualities which did not prevent them, however, from trying to find out, on their side, all there was to be known about the business of any stranger who might visit their town.

It did not require the exercise of much ingenuity to induce Don Gregorio to disclose the object of his visit. There was no longer any reason for keeping it a secret, and he stated it frankly to those who questioned him in the matter.

Amazement and stupefaction reigned in Villafria when it was known that Doña Luz was a millionaire—the heiress to an immense fortune.

The surprise of Don Acisclo was in no way inferior to that of his fellow-townspeople.

Although nothing had been further from his thoughts than that Doña Luz was to be a great heiress, he had known of and expected Don Gregorio's visit some time before it had taken place, although he was ignorant of its purpose.

Not many hours before his death the marquis, after making his confession to Don Miguel, had sent for the good Don Acisclo, and, in the presence of the priest, exacted from him a promise, binding him by oath to secrecy, to carry

out, when the proper time should arrive, the commission with which he was about to intrust him.

Don Acisclo gave the required promise, and took the prescribed oath, and the marquis then requested Don Miguel to open a drawer in his writing-desk and take from it a sealed letter which he would find there, bearing the superscription "To my daughter Luz."

When the priest had complied with his request, the marquis, exacting a promise of silence from him also concerning the matter of the letter which he was to regard as a secret communicated to him in the confessional, begged him to take charge of it and to deliver it in person to Don Acisclo, who was to demand it from him on the arrival in Villafria of a certain person called Don Gregorio Salinas, or when two months should have elapsed after the death of a certain lady residing in Madrid, called the Countess of Fajalauza. Don Acisclo was to employ a discreet and trustworthy agent in Madrid to give him notice, as soon as it should occur, of this latter event. On the occurrence of either one of the events mentioned Don Acisclo was to deliver the letter to Doña Luz. In the event of the priest's death, the letter was to pass into the possession of Don Acisclo, and in the event of Don Acisclo's death into the possession of the person whom he should designate as his successor in the charge of delivering the mysterious letter.

Don Acisclo entertained so low an opinion,

although expressed with all due respect, of his ruined master's common sense that, notwithstanding the solemn character of the trust confided to him, he was inclined to attach but little importance to it, and the thought furthest from his mind was that the letter could have even the remotest connection with anything like money. Don Acisclo took it for granted that the letter was some new piece of folly of the marquis.

However, as has been stated more than once, Don Acisclo was a righteous man who lived in the fear of the Lord ; he had never been found wanting in probity or justice, endeavouring to reconcile them both with his own advantage, and he never neglected to fulfil a trust confided to him, always providing that he could do so with little or no inconvenience to himself.

Accordingly, he kept the secret of the letter for many years, a friend living in Madrid being engaged to inform him of the death of the countess when this event should take place.

More than two weeks had elapsed since the news of the countess's death had been received by Don Acisclo, who only waited for the expiration of the time specified by the marquis or the arrival of Don Gregorio to execute the commission with which he had been intrusted.

Don Gregorio, as we have seen, arrived long before the expiration of the two months.

Don Acisclo accordingly demanded the letter from Don Miguel, who delivered it to him without

demur, seeing that the conditions required by the marquis had been fulfilled.

Don Acisclo, knowing now that Doña Luz had inherited an immense fortune, and divining without difficulty that the letter had some connection with this fortune, far from regarding it with contempt, as he had done before, regarded it as being highly important, and lost no time in delivering it to the person to whom it was addressed.

Although the space of time during which the letter remained in Don Acisclo's hands before passing into those of Doña Luz was very short, it was more than sufficient for the ex-steward to form a pleasing hypothesis in his own mind regarding the nature of its contents.

Although Doña Luz at the time of her father's death was very young, she was yet old enough for the marquis to have perceived that she was of a proud disposition, and, as he knew also that she would be extremely poor, he must have regarded it as probable that she would never marry. How, then, was Doña Luz going to manage with so many millions in her possession, unless she had at her side a man of experience and understanding, and one whom she could trust? And who, in the eyes of the marquis, could this man be other than Don Acisclo himself, who had managed the estate with so much ability and zeal? Don Acisclo, then, took it for granted that the purport of the letter was to recommend Doña Luz, in the strongest terms, to make Don Acisclo her steward.

Don Acisclo had already learned from Don Gregorio that the fortune of Doña Luz was invested in foreign bonds, gaining at the utmost an interest of six or seven per cent. per annum. As a good Spaniard and a good Catholic it grieved him to see foreigners—heretics or Jews to a certainty—exploiting this magnificent fortune. How much better could this money be employed in Spain, and especially in Villafria and its surroundings! It was indispensable that this money should be transferred to Spain. Don Acisclo, in accordance with his principle of furthering his own and his master's interest at one and the same time, was already forming plans for the investment of the inheritance. Instead of six or seven per cent., he would make Doña Luz gain nine or ten per cent. interest on her money—a clear gain of three per cent. But as he would find a means of placing the money so that it should gain an interest of twelve or even fifteen per cent. in good mortgages or bonds, or other ways compatible with security, remembering the saying, "Through care the vineyard prospers," Don Acisclo saw himself already converted into something like the manager of a mortgage bank of ingenious mechanism, a sort of suction pump, wherewith to draw into his own possession all the lands and dollars of the province, causing Doña Luz to gain by the operation much more than her money had before been gaining.

Don Jaime was not avaricious; his attention was given to his ambitious projects and to politics,

not to money-making. Money was a matter of little importance to him, as was evident from his having married Doña Luz, who was poor ; and no doubt he would think it altogether reasonable that Don Acisclo should manage the millions of Doña Luz and employ them in furthering the happiness of Villafria by promoting its manufacturing and agricultural interests.

Revolving in his mind these pleasant thoughts, Don Acisclo reached the abode of Doña Luz, entered her apartment, and, as he had hoped to do, found her alone.

After congratulating her on the unexpected and surprising manner in which she had been favoured by Heaven, he proceeded to inform her of the trust that had been committed to him, and the solemn conditions under which it had been given.

"Where is my father's letter?" said Doña Luz, with visible emotion.

Don Acisclo handed her the letter. She broke the seal, took the letter from the envelope, and in silence began to read it. Before she had read it half-way through Doña Luz, who had been seated when she began to read, rose to her feet, showing signs of agitation.

Don Acisclo, who had not removed his eyes from her, was disquieted on seeing this, and said to himself :

"The deuce ! That marquis had the knack of blundering. What if he should have managed matters so that the inheritance shall melt away

like salt in water? What if he should have charged his daughter to transfer the money to some one else?"

While Don Acisclo was making these reflections, Doña Luz, interrupting her reading for a moment, was reflecting also.

At last a smile curved her lips gently. Don Acisclo took this as a good omen.

Doña Luz resumed her reading. The smile became more and more pronounced as she read. At last it changed to a somewhat sarcastic laugh.

"This is curious," thought Don Acisclo. "What sort of witticisms can her papa be indulging in at this late date, more than a dozen years after his death, to make her laugh at so unseasonable a moment?"

Doña Luz had by this time finished reading her letter. . She reflected for an instant in silence—a silence which Don Acisclo did not venture to interrupt, and then began to laugh again, this time a little wildly.

As Doña Luz was sedateness itself, Don Acisclo was confounded by this unaccustomed merriment. There was an instant during which the thought crossed his mind that perhaps Doña Luz was laughing because her father had recommended her to make him, Don Acisclo, her steward. This thought was displeasing, and Don Acisclo frowned.

Doña Luz, however, far from making an effort

to restrain her unseemly gaiety, laughed louder and louder every moment.

"What is the matter?" asked Don Acisclo. "What is there so amusing in your letter as to make you laugh in this way?"

Doña Luz, instead of answering, laughed still more violently than before.

Her laughter had assumed an alarming character. It was plain that it was independent of her will—nervous—insane.

She had put the letter in her bosom. The letter—something she had read in it, or inferred from it—was the cause of her laughter.

Don Acisclo, seeing that her laughter still continued, at last became alarmed. The countenance of Doña Luz was distorted. She was seized by a severe hysterical attack. Sobs mingled with her laughter, and finally she fell to the floor in violent convulsions.

Don Acisclo rang the bell and called loudly for assistance. Don Gregorio, Juana, Tomás, and several of the other servants, hurried to the room.

They were terrified at the spectacle that met their eyes. The convulsions continued. Juana sent for Don Anselmo, the doctor.

The latter, availing himself of the resources of his art, and seconded by the efforts of nature, succeeded after a time in quieting Doña Luz, who remained, however, in a state of great prostration.

Neither Don Acisclo nor any of those present could succeed in discovering the cause of this sudden attack, so unaccountable in a person of the healthy and vigorous constitution of the Marchioness of Villafria.

Doña Manolita came to see the patient, but Doña Luz was equally uncommunicative with her.

CONCLUSION.

FOUR months had passed since the day on which the hysterical attack described in our last chapter had taken place. During this time many strange things had happened for which no one in Villafria could find a satisfactory explanation.

On the day following the attack Don Jaime, to whom we shall henceforth give his title of marquis, for such he now was, arrived in Villafria.

The marquis accepted and duly took possession of the magnificent inheritance of Doña Luz. Don Gregorio immediately afterward returned to Madrid.

All this was perfectly natural. What was not natural—since it was in direct opposition to previously arranged and publicly announced plans—was that the marquis, instead of taking Doña Luz back with him to Madrid, should return thither alone, after a few days' stay in the town, leaving Doña Luz in a delicate state of health.

Those who saw the marquis at the time of his departure declared that his face wore a gloomy

expression and that he seemed to be in a devil of a humour.

Ever since the departure of the marquis Doña Luz had remained shut up in her own room. Not even to go to church did she leave the house. She was either really ill or feigned illness.

In this way, as I have said, four months passed. There were no longer any daily reunions.

Doña Luz saw no one with the exception of Don Anselmo, whom, however, she never consulted even in his capacity of physician, and Doña Manolita, with whom she shunned all conversation regarding her husband, her inheritance, or the illness that had so suddenly seized her.

The disposition of Doña Luz had changed greatly, apparently.

She was now always melancholy and taciturn.

Doña Manolita observed, when she visited her, that her eyes looked tired and red, as if with weeping. At times Doña Luz was unable to restrain her tears, and would let them flow freely in Doña Manolita's presence.

For some time the sadness of Doña Luz had been of a gloomy, deep-seated, and bitter character. Her dearest friend had not ventured either to put the slightest question to her or to complain of her reticence.

At the period at which our story has now arrived, however, the sadness of Doña Luz had begun to be visibly modified. It had become more gentle and communicative.

Doña Luz was not satisfied with seeing her friend only when Doña Manolita came to visit her of her own accord, but often sent for her.

She wept and sighed more than ever, but she was less gloomy. At times a tender smile would break through her tears, like the sun breaking through the clouds.

One morning, finally, Doña Luz wrote the following note to Doña Manolita :

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—I can remain silent no longer. My misery is stifling me, killing me, and I desire to live. I am very unhappy, but there is a hope that smiles upon me. I wish to live, and I fear that this hidden grief will kill me. It is necessary that I should confide it to you, that I should open my heart to you, that your pity and your affection should save me. Come to me at once.

“Your loving LUZ.”

It is needless to say that a very few moments after the receipt of this letter Doña Manolita was with Doña Luz, who, throwing herself into the arms of her friend, kissed her with tears of tender emotion, calling her her only consolation.

“You shall know all,” said Doña Luz. “I should die if I did not relieve my heart by telling it to you. You love me, and you are discreet. Will you promise me to reveal to no one what I am now about to confide to you ?”

"I promise," answered the doctor's daughter.

"Not even to Pepe Güeto, do you understand? Not even to Pepe Güeto."

"Not even to Pepe Güeto."

"Well, then," exclaimed Doña Luz, in a low voice, but with extraordinary vehemence, "the cause of my unhappiness is that a fortnight after my marriage I discovered that the man whom I thought so noble, so generous, so ardently in love with me, so worthy in all respects of my love, on whom I bestowed my heart and hand, on whom I had centred all my affections, is a heartless wretch."

"Are you mad, Luz? What reasons can you have for saying such dreadful words?"

"You ask my reasons? My father, without intending to do so, has revealed everything to me. It was, indeed, a notable excess of precaution that he took!"

And Doña Luz began to laugh with the same nervous laughter which had characterised her hysterical attack.

"Come, come, my life, control yourself. Be calm and go on with your story," said Doña Manolita.

Doña Luz, when she had succeeded in regaining her composure, continued:

"Fearing, should the Countess de Fajalauza make me her heiress, lest Don Gregorio might fail to fulfil his trust, my father, who all his life had been excessively careless, on this occasion

erred on the side of prudence. Influenced partly, it may be, by vanity, he confided the story of his relations with the countess to an old friend of his, to whom he gave, at the same time, certain papers rendering compulsory on the part of Don Gregorio the faithful fulfilment of his trust should he show himself negligent in this respect. My father charged his friend to reveal the secret confided to him to no one, unless it should be necessary to do so for the purpose mentioned. To provide against the contingency of the death of my father's friend taking place before that of the countess this friend was authorised by my father to confide the secret to his son, and to transmit to him his trust. This friend was called Don Diego Pimental. His son is my husband, Don Jaime. For many years past he has known that I might one day become wealthy, but it was not enough for him to know that I might become so, he needed to be certain of it to fall in love with me. Without this certainty I should never have 'pierced his heart with Cupid's arrow? Do you remember when you told me that I had pierced his heart with Cupid's arrow? You know now the golden arrow Cupid used to work this wonder. Don Jaime had no need to see me in order to feel this arrow in his heart; he carried it in his breast when he came from Madrid under pretence of visiting the electors. He knew then that the count was dead and that the countess was dying. While the count lived, while there was a possibility of the

countess dying before the count, Don Jaime took very good care not to fall in love with me. You see now how the love poem of which I had made myself the heroine has ended. The apparent disinterestedness which charmed me in Don Jaime was a well-laid plan to become the possessor, without effort, of seventeen millions. Don Jaime made his calculations well ; he wanted to leave nothing to chance. He has vilely deceived me, for neither did it ever enter into his mind that my poor father could be so cautious as to write me the letter delivered to me by Don Acisclo. Don Jaime supposed—supposed, do I say? He had not the shadow of a doubt in the matter—that it would be impossible I should ever learn that he was in possession of the secret of my inheritance. My love has now changed to hatred and contempt. Not only do I despise and hate him, but I despise and hate the ignoble love with which he inspired me. Why did I fall in love with him? Why did I yield so quickly to his suit? Because I was vain enough to think he loved me ; because I fancied I loved him ; because, like a country girl, I was dazzled by his courtly graces. The love I felt for him is worth no whit more than the love he feigned to feel for me. No, my love was not founded in respect for his moral qualities, which I had no means of knowing, but in gratified vanity, in light-minded admiration of his exterior qualities, of the grace and beauty of his person. I blush to have been his ; I blush for the inclination that led me to consent to be his. The scenes asso-

ciated with his caresses fill me with shame, as the branded criminal is filled with shame at sight of the spot where he has been branded. The interview that took place between us on his return from Madrid when I repulsed him when he would have embraced me was a horrible one. His infamous excuses, his cynical mockery when I tore the mask from him, the contempt with which he told me that I knew nothing of life, and that I had formed a fantastic idea of the world, and the insolence with which he finally called me a mad woman and a fool, have confirmed me in my purpose of never living under the same roof with him again. Now that this ephemeral love is dead, killed by the cruel disenchantment I have suffered, now that the unworthy passion, blessed though it was by the church and sanctioned by the law, that threw me into Don Jaime's arms has turned to gall, another love has revived in my heart, a spiritual love consecrated to a worthy object, a love for which I foolishly blushed, a love which I wished to stifle, which I endeavoured to hide from myself, and which now reappears in my heart, immaculate and pure, although hopeless in this life. Therefore it was that I desired to die. What a difference between the two, Manuela! The other—have you not guessed it?—died for love for me. For this one I am a plaything, the medium through which to acquire wealth. This one does not even know what love means. He scoffs at it. He called me a fool and a mad woman because I regretted that he did not love me with a disinterested love when

he married me ; because I told him that he had profaned and debased love, inspiring me with love for him without sharing that love. Do you think all this a light cause for my anguish ? ”

Doña Manolita was astounded and deeply grieved at the sight of her friend’s anguish, but she did not know what to say to her.

She sighed, lavished caresses on Doña Luz, looked at her with eyes full of compassion, listened to her attentively and was silent.

Finally it occurred to her to say : “ But why do you give way to despair in this way ? Did you not say in your note that you desired to live ? Did you not say that you had a hope ? ”

“ Yes, I have a hope,” answered Doña Luz.
“ This hope alone has kept me from dying.”

* * * * *

Thus far Doña Luz has kept her resolve.

She has not been reunited, and it is safe to say she will never again be reunited to Don Jaime. She still resides in Villafria, where she leads a life of the utmost seclusion.

While her husband shines in the highest circles at the capital, she occupies herself in educating a handsome and intelligent boy with whom God has blessed her and whose name is Enrique.

